



RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 03

Er Mu

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Release That Witch

(放开那个女巫)

by

Er Mu

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Synopsis

Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

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4th Saga - The Envoy

Chapter 201 - Back To The Stronghold

Keeping the power of the pills in mind, Roland didn't immediately order the First Army to chase the fleeing enemy. Instead, he sent Lightning and Maggie to monitor the situation.

Those who had been injured in the line of duty immediately received treatment. During the whole battle, only five soldiers had been injured, hit by spears. Out of the five injured people, four belonged to the artillery group. He was pleased to see that when the enemy's wave reached its striking distance of one hundred and fifty meters, his artillery group didn't disperse in confusion. Instead, they lowered their bodies and hid behind the cannons, so that they could resume the attack as soon as possible after the end of the spear shower.

From the beginning, Nana had been standing behind the defense line waiting on standby. But, the most remarkable part was when the enemy turned around and fled, she ignored the rumbling sound of ongoing gunfire, and ran, together with the old Viscount, towards the position of the artillery soldiers, making sure to rescue and give medical treatment to those victims of short spears. After seeing her actions, it was hard to believe, that only six months ago, this little girl had become dizzy at the sight of blood.

In the end, the five injured soldiers managed to survive. And under the cheers and the salutes of the watching soldiers, Nana left the battlefield.

In fact, this battle was much easier than the last time when they had to deal with the Duke's coalition. Without the drugs, the

addicted militia had entered an extremely vulnerable state. Some of them even ran two to three kilometers, only to throw themselves onto the ground, no longer able to move.

Soon after, Roland's pursuing troops had caught them all and began to escort them back to the Longsong Stronghold. During the chase, the First Army was also able to capture two Knights. Although they did not swallow the pills, they had still lost every thought of putting up a resistance. When confronted with the continuous pursuit, they simply chose to surrender, asking for the opportunity to send a letter to their family and giving a plea for redemption.

Four days later, they reached Longsong Stronghold.

Thanks to the intelligence gathered from the surrendered Knights, Nightingale easily eliminated all the troops left in the stronghold's castle. After killing the captain on the spot, more than 100 militiamen fled in panic, blindly running into an ambush the First Army had set up at the gate.

Later, Roland's men found the captive Petrov in the castle's dungeons. He looked haggard, probably caused by his worry and anxiety, but because of his identity as a noble of the Honeysuckle family, he hadn't suffered through inhumane treatment.

After nearly three months, the Prince saw the Acting Duke once again.

“Being able to see you safe and sound is truly good news, Your

Royal Highness,” Petrov’s uneasiness finally relaxed, then he went through his experiences of the last days, “I did not know that Timothy’s envoy...”

“They all died,” Roland leaned relaxed against his chair and said indifferent “Most of the 1500 people they brought to Border Town have died, and the rest are currently locked in the stronghold’s prison.

When Petrov heard about the complete annihilation of the envoys, he somehow looked a bit surprised, “Your Royal Highness, with this, I am afraid that the new King... no, your brother will see you as a thorn in the eye.”

“So, do you mean I should have deliberately lost the fight, and obediently went with them to King’s City, begging for his mercy?” While asking, Roland looked him directly into the eyes.

Not able to face his view, the latter involuntarily lowered his head, “No, Your Royal Highness...”

“The moment he set foot in the Western Territory, he became my enemy,” the Prince declared in a calm voice.

“It seems that in order to seize power, Timothy Wimbledon is becoming more and more desperate. He is urgently in need of land and titles to divide between the other nobles to ensure their support. In case all you wanted was to live a life in pleasure, why would you want to manage the stronghold for me? You should already be aware of the point, only when I become the King of

Graycastle will your position as the Lord of the Western Territory be set in stone.” Roland paused for a moment and then said, “To prevent this from happening for a second time, I need to form an army to guard the stronghold.”

“Army?” Petrov asked shocked.

“Yes, without any Knights, only built out of civilians, a permanent army.” Roland slowly explained his plans, “You have to pick out 300 people who live inside the stronghold, who will be trained by my subordinates on how to fight. The requirement for the 300 people is: They have to be civilians, they must not be guilty of any crime, they aren’t allowed to be followers of the Church, and lastly, they have to be between the age of 16 and 30 and without any physical disability. During the training, they will be living in Border Town, and I will provide them with weapons. From now on, your Knights and patrols will only be responsible for urban security, I have written down further details on the parchment,” with this, he handed a piece of paper to Petrov, “you can announce a recruitment order and follow through with the screening according to the previous terms.”

If he wanted to have the control of the city garrison in his own hand, it was evident that stationing his own army here was the most appropriate approach. But the scale of the First Army was too small, they weren’t even large enough to defend Border Town, so not even mentioning splitting the force to guard Longsong Stronghold and Border Town. The only possibility and best compromise was to let the other side provide the manpower, while he would carry out the training.

With Nightingale's ability to detect lies, he could guarantee the loyalty of the group, and together with new military training methods and ideological education, it should be possible to form a fighting force soon. As for their weapons, he would equip them with the rapidly outdated flintlocks, so even if they got captured by the enemy, it wouldn't be a problem for him. Moreover, the army could also take over the task of information gathering and transmission, so as long as someone tried to attack the stronghold, Roland would be the first to receive the message.

"I understand," Petrov nodded.

"I will review the people you select, so I can only encourage you to not try placing spies among them, because it would be a meaningless act." Roland warned, "You have already sent spies, and by now, they all have gone to the mines. If there is ever something similar again..."

"No, Your Highness," the other wiped off the sweat on his forehead. "I promise that won't happen."

"Then there's the matter of the church," the Prince said while once more leaning back in his chair. "You probably do not know that the stronghold's church has been burned down by Timothy's men and that they even killed the High Priest. There is only a ruin left now."

"They have burned the church?" Petrov became startled by the news, "This... I have to report it to Hermes as soon as possible."

The Church's law states that the King and the Lord's are obligated to protect the local Church's facilities from any harm, if they cannot prevent it from happening, it has to be reported to the New Holy City immediately. As the former ambassador who was proficient in the law, Petrov's reaction could be seen as normal, and furthermore, such a matter cannot be concealed anyway, I am afraid that the church's follower living in the stronghold have already sent a message to the Holy City on the same day it happened.

"It is true that we should report the matter, but the letter's contents needs to be adjusted appropriately," Roland said with a smile. "You only have to write in the message that the attackers belonged to Timothy Wimbledon and that after they looted and burned the church down, they left the stronghold, disappearing without a trace. In addition, you will put this thing into the letter, "he took a pill out of his pocket and handed it to Petrov, "just state they you had picked it up near the church, they will understand."

"What is this?"

"They are the secret medicine of the Church. Furthermore, it is also the object Timothy desired. It allows ordinary people to get a burst of strength in short time, but when the effect of the drug subsides, their organs will slowly stop functioning, and they will die." Roland explained. "Timothy wants to rely on the drug to strengthen his Army, allowing him to secure his precious throne. So, when the Church's sees the pill, they will naturally understand his intention."

As to whether or not they will take measures, is an entirely

different question.

“I will follow your order, Your Highness,” Petrov said, putting the pill into his pocket.

Chapter 202 - The Road To Development

Roland took a sip of his tea, then said: “In addition, I intend to set up a primary education system in Longsong Stronghold, which will be the examination project that decides whether you will continue serving as the administrator or not.

Hearing the word “examination”, Petrov’s ears immediately stood up, “Primary education system?”

“Yes,” Roland nodded with a smile. Now, after the church had been destroyed, the High Priest killed, and the Church’s forces weakened by more than half, it was a good time to start the fight over ideological positions. He didn’t expect to transform all believers into potential workers who met with his standards; he only hoped to weaken the Church’s influence even further. In case the Holy City wanted to meddle in Longsong Stronghold again, Roland had thought about many ways to keep them away. They shouldn’t even think about building a new church here.

“The primary education should be attainable for all of Longsong Stronghold’s residents under the age of forty, regardless of whether they are men or women. The training will include reading and writing, simple calculation, the spread of natural knowledge and also ideological education.” Roland waved his hand, holding off the other’s questions, “Rest assured, the cost will be deducted from the tax paid to Border Town. From the beginning of the next month, you only have to pay 20% of the tax; the remaining 10% will be used as special education fee. With it, you can recruit a few scholars from King’s City, or hire local nobles, knights or squires, but these people won’t need so much money. 10% of the tax are at least 1000 gold royals, so you have to do much more than just hire

people with it.”

After thinking for a moment, Petrov opened his mouth and said: “Your Highness, do you mean to say, that I should use the money to motivate the civilians to attend the education courses?”

This guy’s mind is indeed very sharp, Roland laughed, “That’s right, with the exception of the children, most people have to earn their livelihood during the day, so their education courses have to be held in the evening, allowing them to carry out their work during the day. And after being busy the whole day, instead of resting, no one wants to come round only to hear other people’s nagging them, not to mention using their brain to learn how to read and write.

“Because of this, you have to lure them with some means to learn, such as providing them a dinner that has meat, or if they are able to speed up the learning process they can also get a monetary reward, etc., and of course, a bright and spacious classroom is also essential.” He paused, “In short, you must try every means to popularize attending the education courses to all the residents of the stronghold. As I said, this is also your examination: After one year, more than 50% of the stronghold’s population needs to have reached literacy.”

“But, Your Royal Highness...” Petrov hesitated. “No matter if they are scholars or belong to the nobility, they fundamentally have no experience with teaching civilians how to read and write, even less, teaching them natural knowledge and ideological education,” he had to read the hard to pronounce noun of the parchment. “In fact, even I do not quite understand the words

myself. By employing these people, I am afraid you cannot achieve your desired result.”

“Do not worry, I have already taken all that into account,” Roland paused. “I’ll send a group of officials from Border Town’s City Hall to help you realize it. Furthermore, all the books you need for the education will be provided by Border Town. They have a wealth of experience in how to teach, so they can show the people you recruit how to teach, and then, your personnel will have to start to educate the residents. At that time, you and them will have comprehended all the necessary details, the specific arrangements will be done when they arrive.”

This way, as long as Petrov wanted to keep in control of Longsong Stronghold, it was inevitable that he worked together with the Prince’s staff, and by placing his aids at critical positions within the Ministry of Education, news reaching or happening in Longsong Stronghold could also be passed on to Border Town in the first moments.

Seeing that Petrov didn’t show any objections, Roland began to explain his final command: “Thirdly, I plan to build a road between Longsong Stronghold and Border Town to shorten the traveling time between the two locations for pedestrians and caravans.”

“Your Royal Highness, don’t we already have a way between those two?” Petrov asked in surprise.

A mud path created by people walking over it can be counted as a road? With a width less than two meters, filled with mud by the

rain, and furthermore, with all its holes, it will never be suitable for high-speed carriages.

Roland shook his head. “I want to build a road that can accommodate at least two carriages side by side. A road that is flat and straight, and won’t be covered with water during rain, exactly like the road in Border Town.”

“You mean a macadam road?” the Acting Duke looked a little surprised, “The costs of such a road isn’t low, it requires the mason to cut the stones and then, they have to pick out the stones with the right sizes which can be used together. A gravel road to Border Town would at least cost five thousand gold royals, and with all due respect, Your Highness, we will never get so much money without a tax increase.”

“The stronghold only needs to provide the workforce.” The Prince stated bluntly, “You will issue a recruitment notice throughout the whole Western Territory, not just Longsong Stronghold, including all of the other noble’s territories. The monthly salary will be six silver royals, with that sum, I believe there should be plenty of applicants.”

“For laborer, six silver royals are quite a high salary,” Petrov nodded, “may you tell me how many people you want to recruit?”

“At least two thousand people,” Roland replied.

The monthly cost for such an amount of handymen wasn’t a small sum, together with masons and gravel workers, in the eyes of

others, it would definitely regard as a ridiculously high costs. Very few Lords would be willing to put their money into building something which seemingly wouldn't provide and return. This thought process could also be seen in Petrov's expression. But now, with Border Town being able to sell steam engines, and to maintain the balance between income and expenditure, putting the remaining money into upgrading the infrastructure was undoubtedly the best choice to make. After all, Roland never intended to store all the gold royals in a vault, which was often the desire of many of the newly rich.

The construction of a high-quality road connecting the stronghold and Border Town was of the highest importance, not only to facilitate the trade between both places, but was also a prerequisite for the rapid deployment of the armed forces. If the trip is an inconvenience, even if I receive the news of an attack on the stronghold at the earliest possible moment, I would only be able to reach the stronghold in three days, I am afraid that by that time, the enemy's banner will already be flying over the highest tower.

"I understand," Petrov said.

"Now that you have so much to do, I will soon return to Border Town. Do a good job, 'Mr. Ambassador', don't let me down."

"What do you plan to do with the people held in jail, Your Highness?" Petrov asked, after a moment's pause.

For the first time, Roland didn't know what to answer, and after a moment of silence he spoke, "Contain them, they won't be able

to live for long anyway.”

...

Climbing onto Little Town, the Prince embarked on his homeward journey.

“You do not seem to be in a good mood?” said Nightingale after appearing next to him. “Is it because of the civilians?”

“They were all forced by Timothy,” Roland sighed. “If they hadn’t taken those pills, they would not act like his minions at all and wouldn’t have to die on an unfamiliar land.”

“This is not your fault.” The Nightingale reached out and held his arm.

“Of course not,” Roland said without hesitation, “If I hadn’t stopped them, Border Town would have become the victim of Timothy’s desire for power. And of course, the Church that made those pills is also one of the culprits.”

“That’s the reason why you will wreck the Church, to end the dispute, so that people no longer have to kill each other for such senseless reasons, right?” Nightingale asked with a smile, “No matter if they are ordinary people or witches, under your rule, they will all live a happy life. ”

“...” Roland looked into Nightingale’s shiny eyes and gently

nodded, “Ah, that’s a promise.”

Chapter 203 - Home

The sea was like a blue earth, only more flat.

If Maggie had been here, she would be constantly chirping and she could also ask her about how far it still was to the island, nowadays, the only sound she heard were the sea's waves crashing against the sides of the ship. Although hearing that for a long time became tedious, for the crew, it was actually a lucky beat, it meant that today was a day good for sailing.

Oh, now there is another one, Ashes thought. Under the pressure of a foot, the old teak board issued a slight squeak sound, telling her that someone was coming.

"I did not expect that you actually lived in a place like the Sleeping Island," a white-haired old man stepped to her side, his hands resting on the railing, "That place, although it looks great, once the tide comes, most of the land will be flooded by the sea, it's not suitable for a settlement. Why not live in Crescent Moon Bay? It is the second largest Island of the Fjords, there are still many uninhabited spaces there.

One Eye Jack, the Captain of 'The Charming Beauty', as his name suggested, he had a blindfold on his face which completely concealed his left eye. He was also one of the few Captains that were willing to transport goods for the witches, even though the people in the Fjords didn't hate witches, unlike the inhabitants on the mainland, but they also didn't love dealing with outsiders.

“Not everyone is willing to deal with witches like you are,” Ashes smiled, “The sea will indeed flood sleeping Island, but it is precisely because of this, that as the third largest island of the Fjords, is still a deserted island.

“The third largest island doesn’t mean that it also offers the third largest amount of living area,” Captain Jack just shrugged his shoulders. “If you cannot live on it, its size doesn’t matter, for example, the Searing Flame Island.”

“What the witches are best at, is altering nature,” she said earnestly, “Moreover, now where the island has become our home. As long as we don’t have to face the suppression of the Church, we can create an entirely different world there, a... ‘New World’.” She paused for a moment. “How long has it been since the last time you were on Sleeping Island?”

The Captain took off his hat and scratched the back of his head, “It’s been almost a month now. Last time I had to deliver a batch of witches and a warehouse full of pearl rice. To tell you the truth, when they saw the group of young women frolicking on the ship, the expression on the faces of my sailors was only too foolish. You know how difficult it is for a stripeling to sail over the sea, they are similar to a volcano that can erupt at any time, but fortunately I stopped them from drinking. Otherwise, my beloved ship may have met with a disaster.”

Ashes automatically ignored the latter half of his words, “A month is enough time to make radical changes, Captain. I bet that when you see Sleeping Island again, it will be quite differently than from the Island you remember.”

“Is that so?” Jack whistled. “Then I will look forward to it... Wait a minute, what’s that?” He leaned over the side of the ship, trying to look ahead, “Monkey! There is something in front of the mast!”

The sailor, known as Monkey, used his hands and feet to nimbly climbed to the crow’s nest at the top of the mast, and then lifted the observation mirror, “Captain, that should be an island!

“Island? What nonsense are you speaking, “Captain took out his compass and glanced at it,” We still aren’t near Sleeping Island, but except for it, what other island could it be?”

“But it really is an island, Captain, I swear!”

“To me your vow is as useful as a fart, let me take a look,” Jack said, taking off his hat.

“No, no, Captain, do not you come up here, up here, the wind is very strong,” after observing for a while, Monkey continued, “By the Three Gods!” He shouted, incredulously, “I know what it is, it really is Sleeping Island! It’s become taller!”

...

The Charming Beauty slowly approached the pier of the Sleeping Island, and the boatman could scarcely believe his eyes.

The towering island was similar to a small mountain which stood out above the sea level. The mountain wall was perfectly straight and precipitous, distancing the top of it by at least several feet from the sea level.

Ashes, who arrived at the island for the first time showed a much calmer reaction than most of the other people, which was in the eyes of Captain Jack were the very symbol of calm and self-confidence.

“You win,” he sighed. “I never expected that you would be able to make an island rise. It is not surprising that the bunch of madmen in the Church hate your witches after all, your abilities make you almost comparable to the gods.”

“Uncle Jack, it’s not like you said, that the island has risen up,” a young girl that stood at the pier to welcome them laughingly said, “we just built a ‘wall’ around Sleeping Island, if you wait for a moment, you can come with us and take a look to understand it.” Finished speaking, she turned to Ashes and bowed her head in salute, “You have finally come back, Lady Tilly has been talking about you for a long time.”

Ashes touched her head, “You don’t need to be so polite, Molly. I will have to trouble you with carrying my stuff.”

“Leave it to me,” said the girl, patting her chest.

After the sailors had moved the grain from the cargo hold to the pier, Molly summoned her magic servant, a light blue sphere with

two arms that could be transformed at will. It took hold of a dozen bags of grain with its arm. Soon after, the arm turned into a net, and was firmly grabbed by the other arm while the sphere floated in the air. Then she proudly said, “Let’s go.”

“Oh, that’s truly a convenient ability,” the captain slapped his fist in his palm. “Men, have you seen it? A work for which so many of you are needed, was done by a little girl.”

The constructed pier of the Island reached to the half the wall’s height, if they ever wanted to step on the top and enter the island, the entire group of people would have to climb the flight of steps which circled along the wall. Ashes instantly understood the idea behind “building a wall circling the island.”

Instead of raising the island, they had rather raised the outline of the island, turning the entire Sleeping Island into a basin surrounded by a thick edge. And this edge, which circled the island, was the so-called wall Molly had spoken off. At the inner side of the wall, there were many stairs leading down it and nestled below them laid Sleeping Island.

“This... is incredible,” Captain Jack smacked his lips. “You have turned this island into a city, just imagine how it would look like at high tide, my God, you would be living below sea level!”

“It’s indeed as you have said,” Molly was unable to mask her grin, “Because of this, we also have two docks, one at the bottom of the ocean, and one at sea level. Of course, you can also say that one is at sea level and the other is in midair.”

Coming to the center of the island, they came across of all kinds of houses. Unlike those traditional wood or brick houses, these buildings seemed like the wall as if they had just grown out of the ground, fusing the body of the house together with the ground.

There is no doubt that, together with the wall, they count as a Lotus masterpieces.

“Sister Ashes, the house at the most northern end is Lady Tilly’s palace, I will take the Captain with me to complete the delivery, you don’t need to come along for this, it would be for the best if you first went to go see the Lady,” the little girl waved in the direction of the path.

Ashes nodded, and said goodbye to the two, quickly following the path to the North. Along the way, she saw a lot of familiar faces, they all either bowed in greeting or waved at her with a smile. The homeland of the witches, the word grew brighter and brighter within Ashes’ heart, filling her whole body with strength.

The founder of the homeland was Tilly Wimbledon, the Queen of Witches.

And contrary to the Royal Palace, her spacious house had no guards in it, and there were also no locks on the doors. Allowing Ashes to walk through the vestibule, and directly step into the hall, only to see a familiar back in front of her.

She quietly walked on tiptoe to behind her counterpart and

blindfolding the gray-haired woman's eyes with her hands.

“I perceived you as soon as you reached the door,” the other laughed. “Do not forget how I picked you out of the crowd to begin with.”

The extraordinary had the ability to sense the magic in others, and between two extraordinaries this feeling was even stronger. This was because their magic was connected with one another, like an invisible fetter, firmly connecting Tilly and her together.

“I'm back,” Ashes said softly.

“En,” Tilly replied cheerfully, “Welcome home.”

Chapter 204 - Tilly Wimbledon

For a moment, the two of them enjoyed the warm atmosphere, until Ashes' attention was drawn to a bunch of jewel-like gadgets in front of her, curiously she asked, "What are these?"

"Come," Tilly patted the place next to her body, "I'll show you something interesting."

Ashes followed her suggestion and sat cross-legged next to Tilly, seeing how she put a white silk glove over her hand, which had a crystal ruby embedded on the back of the hand.

"This is... a tracking Stone?"

Tilly didn't give her an answer. Instead, she just smiled and reached into the open air, suddenly, a flash of lightning jump from her fingertips, hitting the ground, issuing a crackling sound, followed by smoke rising from the ground, finally leaving behind a palm-sized black mark.

Ashes couldn't believe her eyes, "You have a new ability..."

Tilly Wimbledon was an extraordinary, her magic was only usable on herself, manifesting in her unsurpassed intelligence, making it impossible for her to have her magic manifest like typical witches' abilities would. The lightning flash just now meant that she now possessed a whole new ability, something which should have been impossible. A witch could never have two kinds of primary abilities, this was common sense that all witches

were aware of.

Tilly took the glove off and handed it to Ashes, “It is not that I have a new ability, rather it is because of this stone.” She smiled, “It has the power to change how your magic works, and make your magic to even show an effect totally opposite to your current one.”

When Ashes rubbed the jewel on top of the glove, she became shocked to her core; she immediately knew that Tilly hadn’t lied to her, which meant that from now on, non-combat witches would also have the ability to fight, significantly enhancing the witches’ ability to resist the against enemy. “How many of these stones do we have?”

“There’s only one,” it seemed that Tilly already understood Ashes thought process, “in addition, it’s also not that easy to use. You have to accept magic as something that actually exist; then you have to fill the stone with this magic and only then you can release it.”

For a long time Ashes painstakingly meditative wished for it, but no trace of light could be seen.

“Do you believe me now?” Tilly said teasingly, “We extraordinary have it better than others, we can sense magic, for other witches, it is much more challenging, it’s taking our imagination and comprehension to its limits. As a matter of fact, I have already tested a lot of witches, but only two to three out of one hundred were able to comprehend it and release the lightning early enough.

“Are you mocking me for being slow-witted?” Ashes took off the glove and threw it to the side.

“Pretty much,” Tilly raised her eyebrow, “At that time, I merely used...”

To stop her, Ashes kissed her, only permitting her to croon for a bit... when they finally separated, the latter took in a long breath, “Well, not so stupid after all.”

“And what is with those other stones?” As if wishing to continue, Ashes licked her lips. Only in the presence of the 5th Princess, was she able to fully relax, “Could it be that they all possess other kind of capabilities?”

“Yes, they show a different result,” Tilly confirmed, a blush had still not gone from her cheeks. “However, they still won’t allow the ordinary person to possess witch-like abilities, only people with magic power can arouse it.” She paused, “Which left me with a question.”

“What is your question?”

“What exactly is magic?” Tilly said slowly, one word at a time, “For a long time now, the witches abilities were manifold and varied widely, showing a high degree of uncertainty to it, and in the perception of an extraordinary, witches were also different. But with this strange stones, magic becomes completely be the same. Through it, any witch can release the exact same ability.

Therefore, I might have been following the wrong lead previously, magic itself is perhaps one type of omnipotent power, but us witches can merely manifest one of its forms.”

“Then these magic stones?” Ashes asked.

“They can only release, but they cannot gather magic. It is not clear whether they are human-made, or formed from nature,” Tilly said regretfully, “According to legend, they were unearthed from within the relics. At present, the greater part of them have already spread within the folk; I only managed to collect this much... I heard that an ancient ruin lies in the eastern part of the Seawind Region, I really want to go and take a look for myself, maybe I could find more information about magic and some intelligence on the forgotten history there.

Several of the words, Tilly had used, left Ashes unable to make sense of what she was hearing, and furthermore, Ashes also reluctantly had the thought, In the end, as long as we are able to live, who cares about what had happened 400 years ago.

“It is better you don’t. Right now, the Seawind Region is the most dangerous region in all of the Kingdom of Graycastle.”

“Why?”

“Before I set off from Port of Clearwater, I’ve heard the sailors chatting about that Garcia Wimbleton’s Black Sail Fleet being dispatched to the Seawind Region, which belongs to Timothy, as its destination. Directly hitting his camps from behind the

frontlines.” Ashes explained, “When the martial law had finally been lifted, I took the next opportunity to leave the harbor. If my information is correct, I am afraid that the Seawind Region has already been turned into a sea of flames.”

“They are still fighting each other,” Tilly looked a little worried, “This way, the Church will take advantage of it and start an invasion. If we cannot unite, Graycastle will fall. The same as had happened to the Kingdom of Endless Winter, we will be swallowed by the Church.

This sentence startled Ashes, and was instantly noticed by the 5th Princess, “What is it?”

“Nothing,” she sent her a wink. “You look just look somewhat similar to Roland Wimbledon. Furthermore, he even said the same thing to me.”

“Oh? Did you see him?” Tilly’s interest was picked. “By the way, you didn’t tell me anything about the trip to the West!”

“I had heard news that the Witch Cooperation Association was in Border Town, but Shadow should have already told you of this,” Ashes embraced her counterpart, “The results that I had discovered, was that the so-called Holy Mountain they had supposedly found, was a hoax created by Roland. He took over the Witch Cooperation Association and was secretly recruiting the witches...”

Afterward, she told Tilly what she had heard and seen during the

week she had stayed in Border Town, “And at the end, he also said to me, that we have to unite, if we want to resist the Church. If they ever attacked us here in the Fjords and we could no longer stay, we are always welcomed in Border Town.”

“Well...” Tilly thought for a moment, and then suddenly said, “That man is not Roland Wimbledon. He has been replaced by someone.”

“What?”

“You said he had gathered a great number of witches around him, right?” What I guess is, that among them, a witch took control of him, or simply changed her appearance to match his.” Tilly said bluntly, “I’ve grown up with Roland, it is clear that compared with my two other brothers and my third sister, the thing he was always worst at, was to cover up the truth, even if he were to tell a lie, the lies would still be full of a hundred loopholes. It is impossible for him to disguise as another person.

As for the weapons you said they could use to fight against the God’s Punishment Army, they are only proving it... An individual may hide his true character, but he cannot fake scholarly knowledge, the court mentors never taught him those things, so how can he know it?” Tilly stated, “The people that are born into the world aren’t born with knowledge, so he is certainly not my stupid and annoying brother.”

“Is... it’s like that?” Ashes frowned.

“Nevertheless, it is still necessary for me to get in contact with them,” Tilly sighed. “After all, Roland Wimbledon is still my brother. Even though he might be ignorant and incompetent, that doesn’t mean that he is hopeless. Compared with others, he was the most harmless. So I hope, that the witches of the Witch Cooperation Association haven’t already buried him in the earth.”

“I do not think they’d do that,” Ashley thought of Wendy, “I also left Maggie with him, at the end of the month, she should come back and bring us news from Border Town.”

“That it the only way, after all, our current focus doesn’t lay here,” speaking until here, the 5th Princess freed herself from the embrace and went to the garden, and said, with open arms, “Now that you are back, the cleaning program can finally be implemented. I want no traces of the Church to be left in the Fjords. Only then will the Fjord’s truly become the home of the witches.

The sun shone from behind Tilly’s body, making it appear as if she was covered by a layer of gold. Her long gray hair caressed her cheeks like golden threads, her face was full of confidence, as if there didn’t exist any enmity that could strike her down.

“I wish to devote my life to you, honored Queen of mine.” Ashes vowed, with a smile.

Chapter 205 - Microscopes

After Timothy's armed forces had been repulsed, Border Town became calm once again.

Roland selected three people from the City Hall's Ministry of Education and added another two teachers to form a team, which he then sent, together with some of Soraya's books to Longsong Stronghold. No matter how much effect they could achieve, he finally took the first step for the assimilation of the stronghold.

Petrov, although he did not excel at commanding a battle, his performance in administration was outstanding. In just one week, two thousand recruited road-workers, escorted by cavalrymen, came to Border Town one after the other. If not for the second batch of ten blast furnaces he'd already put into production, Roland would also never have dared to make the firm resolution to establish a hard road between the two locations. But now, he finally had the opportunity to extravagantly spent a lot of money.

Roland named the road the 'Kingdom Main Street', and Karl, the Head of the Ministry of Construction, was fully responsible for its construction. Its structure and the streets' in the town were exactly the same; a cement-stabilized gravel layer. During this era, where there existed no heavy vehicles, this kind of pavement was already sufficient to undertake every transportation tasks. Moreover, with a good drainage performance, if the circumstances ever demanded, later on, concrete or even an asphalt pavement could always be added.

To always have enough construction material, four steam-driven

milling machine replaced the labor-power that was required to crush the stones, producing dozens of tons of gravel and material each day. With its limited transportation capacity, hindering the further rise of the output, hundreds of people were needed to send the stones, in carriages, to the construction site during the day. For the later generation of roads, one single muck car would have been enough to complete the whole shipment.

With the exception of the four furnaces which maintained the clay brick firing, the rest of the blast furnaces had been put into the production of cement powder. After going through repeated component tests, as well as making sure that the mine provided enough iron powder, Border Town's cement production were far better than the original batches, whether it be its quality or quantity.

However, the mass transport of gravel and cement powder also brought a large negative impact to the town, of which the most severe problem was the dust. Until the afternoon, there had only been little wind, so that a dense cloud of dust could be seen flying in the sky, turning the street into a light yellow. Although most of the town people did not mind such a situation, for Roland, there was nothing worse than having to shut all of the doors and windows during the hot summer.

Therefore, the carriages for transporting the cement powder and gravel had been fitted with a cover plate as quickly as possible, to reduce the dispersion during the transportation. At the same time, he also used it as a chance to promote Leaves' ability. Within a few days, the inside of the town was covered with shade providing trees, they were symmetrical parasol trees, which Leaves had grown one branch of after another, creating the impression that

the scenery appeared to be full of green for as far as the eye could see. With Roland's additional appeal to all of the people, that they should take the initiative and sprinkle water over the dust, the situation had quickly been improved.

The straight distance between the two places was less than 70 kilometers, but considering that the road had to avoid the extensions of the Impassable Mountain Range, the total length of the road would be around 100 kilometers and its expected construction duration would be one year. With roads of such excellent quality, some modern kinds of vehicles could also come in handy, such as bicycles and steam powered cars.

In his vision for the future, the development of education and the upgrading of the road were necessary steps to fuse the two cities together. just like the cities of the later generations would energetically carry out urban integration. After the land between these two places was fully opened up, Border Town and Longsong Stronghold would slowly merge into one huge city. And in case he could even integrate the southern hill into the city, he could then, open up a path through the edge of the mountains, and even get an outgoing sea port for himself.

Of course, being able to develop so much land would require an even larger population. And in response to the possibility of future wars, the city would need to be self-sufficient with its food production, while also providing a significant number of workers for the industrial production. From his preliminary calculations, he would need around one hundred thousand residents, while Graycastle's largest city, King's City, had only around twenty to thirty thousand people.

When thinking about this issue, Roland remembered that the North and South of the Kingdom of Graycastle, are both places that have recently experienced a war. So, when the winter comes, it is likely that there will be a large number of refugees coming who would be deprived of food and clothing. By offering them food and a warm shelter, they can all be absorbed into Border Town.

Furthermore, I also have to take into consideration that there should also be many refugees within the Kingdom of Endless Winter and the Wolfsheart Kingdom. For that reason, it would be better to write Margaret a letter and ask her to help me to find out how the situation is within those two countries.

...

After he had finished writing down the recent development program, the Prince folded the paper and placed it into the drawer. Afterward, he stretched out his tensed-up body and decided to go to Anna's room to take a look at how much progress she had made with creating a lens.

Ever since he learned about the reasons for Soraya's magical evolution, he was intent on making a microscope, which would allow the witches to observe the structure of cells.

If they could examine the unusual microscopic world with their own eyes, it might lead even more witches to evolve a new ability, the worst case being, he will at least, arouse their interest in learning about it.

For the production of microscopes, creating the convex lens responsible for enlarging the object wasn't difficult, the difficulty part laid in the problem that the focal length was differently for every hand-polished lens, therefore matching the eyepiece to the objective was a delicate operation, needing to adjust the distance between the two lenses repeatedly.

He had described the principle behind the convex lens only once, and then given Anna a few pieces of crystals that had a fine quality letting her cut the lenses and measure their focal length. Now, after three days, Roland's heart was full of curiosity at to what extent Anna had been able to realize it.

When he came to the door of Anna's room, Nightingale sent him a smile, standing against the wall. She seemed to be saying that she wasn't going to follow him in, since she had reduced her stealth time, Roland no longer had to guess her whereabouts. And whenever he and Anna wanted to be alone, she would always choose to stand at a distant location.

When he opened the door, he saw Anna sitting at the table, playing with a metal tube.

"How is it?" He asked, stepping forward.

The moment after the question left his lips, he became shocked. There on the table laid several instruments which resembled an actual microscope, coming very close to the sketches he had drawn for her.

“With the few test products I made according to your blueprints, I can indeed see a lot of details which are usually very difficult to discover,” she looked up, letting her slender bangs slide down from one side of her face. “I used it to look at paper, leaves and stagnant water, and found out that they look very different from their usual appearance.” Since their experience during the hot air balloon trip, when they had both been alone. Anna no longer used any titles, which also made him feel very more relaxed.

“How did you do it,” Roland exclaimed, “The sketch was only a rough outline.”

“The outline was enough,” Anna laughed. “You see, as long as the eyepiece and the objective lens are fixed at the appropriate distance, they can play the role of the amplifier. Afterward, they only needed to be fixed to an iron pipe, and with this, the microscope’s body is completed. As I was testing the magnification of the lens, I found out that the objective and observation target had to maintain a particular distance within which I could see a distinct image; whenever my hands shook the image would become blurred. From your diagram I could see that, you needed a frame to which to attach the lens to, and a platform, which could be moved up and down to get to the best distance to the object.” She paused. “But it is harder to figure out for what the bottom piece is, can you tell what it is for?”

Roland swept his eyes over the drawing and discovered that this issue was his own mistake. It was a mirror, which was used to increase the light falling onto the object, but during this era, they had yet to invent the mercury mirror. The typical aristocrat still used a bronze mirror or an iron mirror to arrange their appearance. While they had a glass frame that was covered with a

thin silver layer within the Imperial Palace, to get a better reflection effect. Even without this mirror, as long as the sunlight was strong enough, the microscope could still be used.

After explaining the mirror in detail, he couldn't help being amazed by Anna's comprehension. Even by solely relying on a rough drawing of an outline, she had created a product which came close to the finished goods, something which would be absolutely impossible for him to have done.

Seeing that when Anna had bowed her head to examine a new lens, she was exposing her fair neck, Roland couldn't stop from stepping forward, and wanting to kiss. But she merely placed her hand on his face and gently pushed him back, "Later, Your Royal Highness, I'm busy now. "

"Ah... fine."

Chapter 206 - “Insect Swarm”

In the end, the problem of the mirror was solved by Soraya.

According to her, she had went and fetched some mercury from the laboratory, and spread it directly on top of the glass, afterward painting a shiny coated layer on top of it. In this way she achieved a similar effect to that of a mercury mirror, but also eliminating the risk associated with mercury vapor poisoning.

Compared to a pasted silver mirror, the overall coated mirror offered much better reflection. Afterward, Roland simply set aside a number of crystal glassware, so that each witch could get a small hand mirror. The small gift, which allowed the witches to clearly see their appearance made them all very happy, even Scroll who was usually always exposing a neutral expression revealed a rare smile. Seeing all this let Roland sigh in regret, although the witches were infertile, they were still women at nature.

Unfortunately, this useful commodity could temporarily not be sold to the public at a low price. After all, its base was made out of the highly priced crystal glass. Furthermore, the laboratory had also consumed a lot of crystal glass to create this colorless, transparent container.

Kyle Sichi, contrary to what one might expect, knew how to create crystal glass, but the laboratory had been burdened with other tasks so that there were seldom any empty hands. Most of the apprentices were busy with refining the two acids, soaking the cotton fire. While the chief alchemist took two or three disciplines and concentrated entirely on solving the barrier to the creation of

mercury fulminate. Until the industrial acid method was thoroughly researched, they still didn't want to make anything else for the time being.

Apart from the reflecting mirror, Roland also suggested that instead of manually moving the stage to control the distance to the object, it could also be done by turning a small knob on the side. He only needed to describe the two alternation with a few words, before Anna understood what he meant. Summoning her black flame, the new stabilizing framework was quickly constructed. Afterward, she picked the two set of lenses with the highest degree of magnification. In this way, creating the very first optical microscope.

Taking advantage of the sufficient afternoon sun, Roland called all of the members of the Witch Union into the castle's backyard, thereby starting the first ever Fundamental Biology class.

When Lily came to the backyard, she discovered that the plants had become more lush and flourishing.

The grapes on the wooden frame had turned into a bright red-purple hue. A foggy memory told her that they were less than a week from turning ripe. From time to time, Lighting would fly up and pick a bunch of ripe grapes for everyone. And that big and silly bird which had recently joined Border Town, bluntly sat on top of the shelf, raising its head to peck at the grapes and swallow them down.

In the backyard under the shade sat His Royal Highness and Anna. They were happily chatting with each other, looking just like an intimate couple. But Lily knew, they were definitely not telling each other words of affection. In case she was to approach them to listen, she would definitely hear a bunch of unfathomable mysterious nouns belonging to a debate that she was unable to make any sense of...

For example, about how the small balls looked like, how a cat could be living and dead at same time, matter turned into a wave, and so on. This was probably also the reason why Nightingale would always keep a distance of five meters away from them. After all, when listening to them for a long time, any person would definitely become drowsy, ai!

Wendy was always waiting with Scroll, whenever she met her, Wendy would show a gentle and soft smiling expression. Sometimes, she even felt that from the other's point of view she was seen as a child. Lily helplessly sighed, first looking at Wendy's chest, then bowed her head to look at her own, there was indeed worlds between them.

When can they turn into that, maybe then I won't be regarded as a child anymore.

After all the witches had arrived, Lord Roland put two gray-black metal utensils on the table. Having made the items, it would now be possible to see the tiny world of microscopy. Lily thought, maybe the object won't look the same after magnification, but that everything in the world is made up out of small balls? This had always been hard for her to believe, after all how could rolling

balls form a solid rock?

His Royal Highness sent a guard to get a bucket of water, then took a few drops and placed them under the microscope, which was different from what Lily had expected. The water in the bucket was neither muddy nor was it dirty. Instead, it was so clear that she could see the sunshine reflecting on the bottom, as if there wasn't anything there at all. Is it... is it really possible that you can see the flowing balls from under the microscope?

“Something is moving in the water!” To her surprise, a sister shrieked, and the moment her voice fell, she shrieked again, “Ah, it ran away!”

“More than one, there seems to be a lot more.”

“Good gracious, these are bugs? None of them look the same at all!”

“This looks more like a transparent crab...”

Lily's heart suddenly suspended, not the small balls, but bugs? His Royal Highness had indeed lied! However... that there are insects is also very strange, ah, just look at the water, there is clearly nothing in it! When it was her turn, the little girl could no longer pretend to be indifferent, she headed toward the microscope and impatiently narrowed her eyes to take a look for herself.

And then, she saw an incredible scenery.

Just in the narrow illuminated area, she saw many bizarre objects recklessly moving about; some had square shapes, while others bodies were covered with hairs. Some looked like a mixed species of bugs and crabs, and others looked somewhat similar to the base of a grain of wheat. No matter which kind of strange shape they had, they were all mostly transparent, as if they had no skin or shell around them, in general, allowing to see the internal body structure clearly. Of course, these insects stomach was almost just as empty as their surroundings.

“Your Royal Highness, are theses really insects?” Scroll asked.

“What you are seeing should be some primitive organism or single-celled algae, calling them insects is not really appropriate, they should be assigned to the class of microorganisms.” The Prince explained.

“Microorganism?”

“Yeah, they’re also an independent life form, but their shape is much smaller, apart from the two you are seeing, there are also even smaller bacteria and viruses. At present the magnification of the microscope is not enough to permit you to see those two microorganism. They are also the reason for food spoilage and a variety of other illnesses.”

The more His Highness Roland explained, the more spirited he became, ” These infinitesimally small life forms are everywhere,

and there are many different kinds. Fortunately, the majority of them is vulnerable to high temperature, and that is the reason why we boil the water before drinking, cook the fish before we eat it and do not reuse our bathwater.”

Although, it was difficult for her to imagine that there were even smaller creatures, when she thought about how drinking will also swallow a lot of insects into her belly, Lily felt goosebumps all over her body.

Hasn't his Royal Highness said that these humble little things are the culprits of food spoilage?

If I can keep the bread and meat porridge fresh, that water... should also be possible.

Thinking until here, she couldn't help herself as she released her magic, covering the droplets under the microscope.

Causing unexpected changes to be born.

She saw how the “insects” began to tremble, then began to quickly change their appearance. Their skin was no longer transparent, but seemed as if they had put on a purple armor. Then long tentacles began to grow on their whole body, and soon after, they started to swallow the insects in their surrounding which have not changed. No that wasn't right... instead of swallowing, Lily saw that they were assimilating each other at an alarming rate. Like a sharp sword, the tentacles stabbed into the body of other microorganisms which then assumed the same

appearance as them.

Not knowing whether it was an illusion or not, she still felt that these transformed organism were still changing the invisible creatures, and it didn't take long until a little purple spot appeared within the water. After a few breaths, more and more of these purple spots appeared, gradually fusing into one piece, as if her field of vision was slowly being covered with a lavender-colored carpet. One by one, the tentacle insects arranged themselves into rows, like a neatly organized army. As if they could feel her attention, they all raised their tentacles up, as if in salute.

This was the first time, that she saw the true face of her ability.

Chapter 207 - Mothers And Replicates

Within her world of fog, Nightingale waited for the witches' magic power to change.

Within this black and white world, she rarely had the opportunity to see so many brilliant colors. Compared to the memory of the time when they were in the search for the Holy Mountain, the magic power within them had increased a lot. Their unceasing practice each day, not only allowed them to better control their ability, it also increased their magical reservoir. But, Nightingale was most deeply moved by the expressions on their faces.

With the Witch Cooperation Association, although Wendy was always gently encouraging them and Cara would always remain steadfast, but even with that, during the days they were in hiding, no one would get a restful sleep. Any wind that moved the grass was enough to rouse the sisters from their dreams. Under the constant chase of the Church and the suspicion of the masses, they were never able to breathe easy. Even after entering the Impassable Mountain Range, this stress hadn't been reduced by much. No one among them knew if they could really reach the Holy Mountain and obtaining their longed-for place to call home. Back then, the atmosphere within the camp was often very gloomy and most of the sisters had shown vacant and apathetic expression.

But now, no longer needing to starve and no longer having to worry about the Church's witch hunt, all of their faces had become filled with an unprecedented spirit. Seeing that everyone was relaxed and smiling naturally, Nightingale heart also felt happy at the thought of their comfort. In the end, the Holy Mountain was

not in the wilderness, but in this small border town.

At that time, she felt a thread of magic shaking.

A cloud out of a purple mist began to rotate, unceasingly surrounding and being drawn to a magical source, like a miniature-storm. This shocking scene could only be seen by Nightingale, after recovering from her initial shock, she stared with wide open eyes and held her breath not wanting to miss any details like the time with Anna and Soraya. Today would be her first time to seeing the condensation of magic with her own eyes.

At the center of this storm, Lily was standing.

She was completely immersed in the microscopic world beneath the microscope, never noticing that the magic within her body had underwent a drastic change.

The cloud of mist became more and more vigorous, steadily accelerating its rotational speed, appearing to become an entity on it's own. But at the same time, this silhouette also began to fluctuate, no longer appearing in its original vortex shape. Finally, the magic was drawn inwards, condensing into a ball, and then gradually came to a stop.

Her newborn magic power neither resembled Anna's solid and smooth cube, nor was it like Soraya's soft silk. It was only the size of a fist, its main body was round, but on top of it there existed eight pairs of wriggling tentacles, four pairs at the bottom, four at the top. At first glance it looked like an... insect.

Roland never expected that he would receive such immediate results with the first Fundamental Biology lesson, and even less that the first witch to evolve her magic would be Lily.

Because her ability was to preserve the freshness of food, in addition to the daily practice, Roland hadn't given her any other tasks, her understanding of her ability also wasn't deep. After listening to Nightingales full report, Roland remained calm and collected, and just nodded. Waiting until the end of the lesson, so that he could ask Lily to stay behind.

"What, you said that my ability has evolved?" Lily was also utterly astonished, "I didn't see those balls you had mentioned."

"Of course not," Roland laughingly shook his head. "Those balls are thousands of times smaller than the microbes, even granted that we bring the optical microscope to its limit, you will still be unable to see the balls which form all of matter."

"Is that so? I thought that by understanding the ball theory it becomes possible to evolve our ability," Lily muttered. "I do not believe that everything in the world is formed out of small balls, something as hard as rocks and steel, if they were really made out of a lot of piled up balls, they would have collapsed into a puddle of sand."

So that's the reason, he thought; it seems that comprehending the microparticle theory is not the only way to promote the

evolution of their ability. “In that case, what did you see?”

“Um...” Lily thought to herself. “Just several purple insects, I believe, that they were summoned by my magic, and it could turn all of the organisms you spoke of into something with the same appearance.”

“Insects?” He slightly stunned for a moment, “And they were as big as a microorganism?”

“Almost,” she said, nodding. “Anyway, afterward I once again used only my eye to look at the water drop, and it was still as transparent and colorless as before.”

“Then... next we should come to the real test.”

Because Lily’s ability was not directly visible to the naked eye, unlike Anna’s and Soraya’s, it was also much harder to test.

When seeing the neatly arranged microbes under the microscope for the first time Roland became startled. It seemed as if they all had a collective consciousness, showing an incredible amount of synergy and consistency.

Next were the sub-experiments, including its impact on the duration time of the magic and which influence the God’s Stone of Retaliation had.

The testing continued for three days, although the little girl was fond of bickering under normal circumstances, she still meticulously carried out Roland's instructions, regardless of her complaints.

Through a large number of sample comparison, as well as discussion with Anna, he roughly figured out how Lily's new ability worked.

Her purple variation was clearly divided into two major categories: mother and replica.

After releasing her magic, the microorganism who changed on their own were the mothers.

The characteristic of the mother organism was similar to Anna's black flame, as long as they were supplied with magic, they would continue to exist. Furthermore, the caster also wasn't allowed to distance themselves further than five meters. Otherwise, they would disappear on their own. Just like any other summon, they were also affected by the God's Stone of Retaliation, within the suppressing area of the stone, the mothers would instantly disperse.

When the mother was in existence, the surrounding microorganisms would be assimilated into replicas in a short time. What made Roland feel incredible was that the replicas which were the "results" of Lily's ability, were just like Soraya's coating, no longer vulnerable to the suppression of the God's Stone of

Retaliation. In simple terms, the creations that were transformed by Lily's mother organisms had become an entirely new life form, and this life form existed in reality.

The replicated organism were assimilated by the mothers, and would take the initiative to transform other organism on their own, yet some of the results made Roland feel very confused, it seemed that the assimilation process didn't go on endlessly. In some of the samples, in all of them were the equal number of replicas added, all of the microorganisms got transformed, while in some other samples, he could see the replicas and the non-variation of microorganisms live in peaceful coexistence.

Due to the lack of more sophisticated observation instruments, this part apparently could only be guessed at.

After discussing it with Anna, Roland got the tentative idea that the number of assimilation a replica could perform was related to its size.

Lily's ability clearly did not distinguish between the different types of microorganisms. Thus, a large number of replica produced by the mothers were created out of the too small to see viruses and bacteria, and also with the microscope, visible protist and single-celled algae. The former body of these replicas determined its assimilation ability. The larger the previous organism was, the more assimilation the replica could perform.

However, a replica of a replica was unable to continue to live by further assimilation. When the number of assimilation was exhausted, the last batch of replicas was only able to survive a day

or so. Boiling the water would also kill most of the replica, in this regard they were no different than another microorganism.

But the interesting thing was, that whenever there was a mother around, these replicas would gather like a swarm of insects gathered around their queen, and arrange themselves in a neat queue, just like soldiers waiting for their orders.

Limited by means of observation, there were still many aspects of Lily's ability which were unknown. For example, whether the mothers and the replicas resembled bacteria and viruses, in this regard, they had a variety of effects on other lifeforms, or if they could take the place of fungi and be used for the chemical industry and food production. It was a pity that currently, the little girl was unable to make any sense out of these ideas, even less able to carry out his orders.

Even though, the replicas had shown an immense development potential in the area of medical treatment. Even if they were unable to do anything else, as long as they were able to assimilate deadly bacteria or viruses, they could still play a significant part in the rapid anti-inflammatory and disinfection. This so-called "medicament" could pave the road for an entirely new era of medical developments.

Chapter 208 - “I’m Truly A Fool”

After wrapping her wet hair into a towel, Lily went back to her room.

Although she had previously accused the Prince of excessively pursuing pleasure, she had to admit, this bathroom thing was indeed... fantastic. Standing underneath the shower and enjoying the ice-cold well water that was washing over her body, sweeping away the sticky and hot feeling of the scorching sun, gave the body a sense of being reborn after a busy day.

However, being so carefree after the shower, she felt a hint of a guilty conscience. During the whole day, she had never restrained herself, instead she had given her sharp tongue free reign. But she now had to ask herself, whether or not she should go to His Highness and apologize.

“Traitor!”

“What?” Lily lifted the hair glued to her front head.

“You obviously do not believe in that ball theory, but now you are the first to evolve your ability,” Mystery Moon knelt on the bed, with her upper body upright and her hand pointing at Lily, “You are a huge liar!”

Lily rolled her eyes, “Eh, I still do not believe that everything is formed out of small balls... how could that be?”

“But Nightingale sister had said that your magic has condensed.”

“That has nothing to do with those balls,” She shrugged her shoulders and climbed into the bed grasping Mystery Moon’s hand. “His Royal Highness said that to evolve your magic you don’t have to accept the theory of the balls, as long as you are able to understand your own magic deeply, it is possible that a fundamental change can happen to your magic.”

“Really?” Mystery Moon pouted.

“Anyway, that is what he’d said.”

In the Witch Cooperation Association, Mystery Moon had never been taken seriously, which resulting in her constant lack of self-confidence, was what Lily thought. Which was the complete opposite to how they treated me, after all, in times of food shortage having the ability to preserve food is very important. But now I can finally understand your feelings, because since we’ve entered Border Town, my ability had become like chicken ribs, completely useless.

She had constantly been afraid of being kicked out of the town, but the result was contrary to her concerns. His Royal Highness, the Prince, although he never assigned any additional task to her, his attitude to her and the other witches wasn’t much different.

Perhaps that was also the reason why Mystery Moon had changed, from being cautious out of a feeling of inferiority, to now

becoming more and more daring. More than half of her cowering was because Cara had never actually paid any attention to her, even going so far as banning her from using her ability in the camp.

“That...” The Mystery Moon frowned, “How will I ever be able to understand my ability, ah? His Highness had said that the magnetic fields are invisible, even the microscope aren’t help with it, ah.”

“Don’t ask me; I also don’t understand mine,” Lily yawned, “In fact, I only know how my ability looks like, but what His Royal Highness said about those cells, bacteria, fungi... I don’t understand any of that. He also said that he would write a textbook for me,” she confessed helplessly, “Spare me, I can’t even read the words.”

“I also want to become more powerful,” Mystery Moon rolled over the bed, “I also want to do more things for His Royal Highness ah!”

Lily sighed, you’re obviously older, but you’re behaving as if you’re even younger than I am, really now... “Maybe you should go and ask sister Anna.”

“Ask her?” She suddenly stopped rolling.

“Yes, you are afraid to even waste the tiniest bit of His Highness time, so the next best thing would be to go ask sister Anna,” said Lily, “Within the whole town, with the exception of His Highness

Roland, she is the one who will know the most.”

“But Anna is very busy too, I heard that all the machines in the town are manufactured by her,” Mystery Moon said hesitatingly.

“So you have to find her and ask during her free time, like after dinner, or ask her to help with heating up the bath water, or even just invite her to take a bath, don’t you have plenty time to ask?” The little girl made some suggestions.

“What you said... seems to be quite reasonable,” Mystery Moon’s eyes lit up.

“Then let’s get some sleep; we have to get up early tomorrow.” Lily finally untied the towel around her hair, and wiped away the hairs that have fallen into her face. Then finally, she laid her head on the pillow. “You’re the one who’s going to blow the candle.”

“Well, okay.” Mystery Moon climbed to the end of the bed and blew the candle out, “Goodnight.”

The next day, Lily did not go as she usually did to the kitchen or wheat warehouse to practice her ability, but instead sat down at the table and began to learn how to use the microscope.

This was the new task given to her by His Highness. Before the arrival of the textbook, she should fully understand the types and shapes of the various kinds of cells and fungi and record their

differences. It didn't matter if she couldn't write, painting pictures would also be sufficient.

And according to His Royal Highness, Anna was also trying to enlarge the microscope's magnification, in case she could achieve a magnification effect of 400 times, then she could see even the smaller microorganism and bacteria.

In the future, her practice content was no longer to keep food fresh. But to try to diversify the body of the mothers and their replicas. Regarding this point, Lily had some problems with comprehending it. Fortunately, His Highness had given her some ideas on what to practice, such as commanding them to mimic the appearance of a single cell, or to use her consciousness to destroy or improve the cells. Of course, this would only be possible if she had a full understanding of all kind of the microscopic life forms. Although Lily did not know if she could achieve this, she at least had to try.

What's more, exploring the unknown world was an interesting thing in itself.

She'd worked on it until the evening, at which time Mystery Moon returned with a dejected expression.

"What happened?" Lily asked curiously, "What did Anna say?"

"She had said a lot," Mystery Moon threw herself onto the bed, "but I could not understand a word of it. She said that the magnetic field is everywhere and that the reason the compass can

indicate direction was because we are inside of a huge magnetic field. Does that mean that my ability is of no use at all? Not to mention the principle of the magnetic field, and the interdependence between moving charged balls and magnetic forces, and that the magnetic field can produce electricity... does all this mean that if I cannot understand the ball theory I also cannot progress?" She mumbled softly. "Say, am I too stupid?"

"Somewhat," Lily bluntly answered.

"Traitor!"

Wendy was delighted that another sister of the Witch Union had gained a new ability.

And Lily's evolution increased also increased the enthusiasm of the other witches, this evening after the end of the course, several people stayed behind and constantly pestered Scroll with questions, even Maggie, after hearing that she could increase her ability by learning, just squatted down on the chandelier and listened honestly.

There was only one person who was exception.

When she went to the back of the room, with her "Natural Science Theoretical Foundation" book under the arm, she saw Nightingale lying on the table, focusing on something else.



Wendy knew that whatever it was had nothing to do with learning.

So, she asked, “What are you doing?”

“Distributing fish, do you want one to eat?” Said the Nightingale, while letting a fish dangling out of her mouth, “I just got them from the kitchen.”

“So many?” Wendy was surprised to see the table piled up with golden brown grilled fish, from where a delicious honey odor assaulted her nostrils.

“Well, the chef saw that I came every day, so he just baked all the rest, anyway, this food can be contained for a long time.” She took out a small bag and put the fish into it. On top of the table already laid five or six similar bags, each of them stuffed to the state of bulging.

Wendy suddenly understood what Nightingale was doing; she was preparing rations. The Witch Cooperation Association always had to be prepared to leave the town at a moment’s notice, so they always had to have enough rations and to distribute among themselves, and they would carry their rations within those bags. Along the way, no matter how hungry they became, they could only eat their provisioned rations, in order to avoid a situation where their amount of food became insufficient. But since their arrival at Border Town, with its stable supply of regular meals, together with regular afternoon tea, none of the sisters had continued with it.

Of course, for Nightingale, rather than preparing food, it would be more appropriate to call it preparing snacks.

“Do not you read the book?”

“I wouldn’t understand it anyway, just alone from hearing those theories and theorems my head already becomes dizzy,” Nightingale swallowed the dried fish, then laughingly said, “Moreover, my ability is already enough, it doesn’t matter to me if I won’t be able to further evolve it.”

So, it was like that.

Compared to her former self, at present Nightingale’s eyes are sparkling. Within them, there is no reluctance or hesitation, only her incomparable nature. Lost people cannot make such an expression, Wendy thought, Nightingale must have found her goal.

Whenever Nightingale has decided on her goal, her firm side, which came from her noble background, would show itself; this was also the case when she had faced Cara.

But Wendy did not ask about it, because she truly believed that she would one day see the answer with her own eyes.

Chapter 209 - Convenience Market

“Stop!”

At May's shout, Irene stopped her downward slash at the vitals with the dagger, “You don't have to look so ferocious, although he is scum wicked beyond redemption, but he is still playing the role of your foster father. So, you have to show some hesitation together within your determination, and in the end you have to show an expression of both relief and peace. Come on, let's do it one more time.”

“Yes!” Irene answered seriously.

Since the first performance on the town square, already half a month had passed; she herself did not know, why she still hasn't left, and instead even took part in the second drama. Today, the cast and crew were rehearsing their third show, “The Diary of a Witch”. Merely looking at the script of the play, this stage drama was destined to become something incomparable. Even when reading it for a second time, it was still such a wonderful and captivating story. It was a story that entirely forsook the romance between prince and princess, had a plot about the intrigues of the court, at the same time was full of praise for the courage, friendship and faith of the common people and the witches... Even though she had only read the script, she couldn't help, but want to applaud the story.

This play was also the reason May had claimed, that she decided to stay in town for the time.

But the real reason, even she did not know.

Irene grabbed the dagger and ferociously stabbed downward, Sam who was playing the role of her foster father released a miserable cry, “You actually...” Then his head fell to the side at a crooked angle, pretending to be gasping for air.

A little exaggerated, May shook her head, “The position she had stabbed you is your chest, how can you have the time to scream and then raise your hand to catch Irene; you will become weak at once. This is the most common form of death, so don’t tell me you had never heard anything about it in drama class!”.

Sam’s cheeks flushed red: “So-Sorry.”

“Again,” May stated expressionlessly.

But Irene’s performance was somewhat different than May had expected, as long as she mentioned particular problems once, Irene would soon correct them. Whether it was her professional attitude towards the theater or her acting talent, both could be regarded as belonging to the top-notch category. It seemed that the title “Flower of the Theater” was not entirely based on the mutual flattery of the actors at the lowest rung.

“This time, it was superb. With this, today’s practice will end here.” When the content of this scene was finally expressed smoothly and clear, May clapped her hands, “Ferlin Eltek should soon end his lecture, right? You should also go home and prepare the supper, after all, that something water...”

“Tap water,” Irene added with a smile.

“Uh, that tap water will be installed before dusk, so if you eat too late, then there will no longer be any water to take a bath with.” May coughed twice.

“Miss May, isn’t the main point we end the rehearsal because Sir Knight does want to meet with you?” Rosia covered her mouth to hide her chuckle, “Currently it is still at least one hour until evening.”

“I heard that Sir Carter is the Prince’s trusted subordinate, he is often within the castle, and also frequently accompanies the Prince,” Tina also shouted, “Ah, ah... but as West Borders most dazzling star, you do not lose, wherever you are, you attract all eyes.”

“You..., that’s enough,” Irene beckoned them with her hand to stop. “Miss May has not accepted Sir Carter yet.”

“...” May raised her brow, could it be that I wasn’t harsh enough in the recent performances? In the beginning, these two people didn’t even dare to breathe loudly in front of me, but now they unexpectedly dare to play a joke on me. It seems that during the following days’ next rehearsal, I will need to provide them with some bitterness to swallow. Otherwise, if it goes on like this, they really won’t match my acting on stage, “I will go first.”

“Many thanks for your instruction!” Irene and the rest of the

group lowered their heads in salute.

Originally, only a theatrical instructor was eligible to enjoy such a courtesy, but May did not care. She only nodded in response then left the rehearsal room, suddenly feeling the scalding hot outdoor air surrounding her.

After going over to the tree at the community center, she sat in its shade and waited. It didn't take long, before a man quickly walked towards her.

It was Carter Lannis, the Chief Knight of the Lord of Border Town.

"I hope you didn't wait for long," Carter said, touching the back of his head.

"It wasn't long," May smiled faintly, "let's go."

At the first time, when he had invited me out, and I rejected him, he not only did not give up, but instead pensively paid me visits, which was completely inconsistent with the arrogance and indifference he displayed. In the end, he had me confused so much that I stayed.

What the other's interest was, May knew very clearly in her heart, but the thought to settle down in this strange land confused and frightened her at the same time.

Even when she had first come to Border Town for Morning Light, she had never had the intention to live here with him for a long time.

In the stronghold, she was the moon that all the other drama stars surrounded, but here, there was no difference between her and the other members of the crew, quite the contrary, as Irene, also a teacher, was even more famous than she was.

Following the broad street covered in shade, the two walked into the direction of the convenience market in the town center.

This town, within one week had completely changed its appearance. Last week, the outside of the district was still bare, but nowadays, it is verdant and lush. As long as it does not rain, they are building almost everyday. If they aren't repairing the roads, they are building those houses, normally they are even building both at the same time. Even in King's City, it would be difficult to come across such a lively scene.

The convenience market was located in the northern part of the square, which itself was also divided into two regions, it was separated in the middle by a line of parasol trees. On the right was the inexpensive area, with a layout similar to that of other markets, and there were wooden sheds open on all sides, only offering a wooden roof. They were selling some affordable iron tools and agricultural products: The former were things like farm tools, hammers, drills, and nails, while the latter were things like eggs, beef, grapes and other food she couldn't name. These goods, put in front of the stalls, were ordered in different categories, and each booth had a person appointed for looking after it.

On the left side was the boutique area, its sides was surrounded by brick walls, appearing more like a one-story house. There, they sold all kinds of goods, but the prices were much higher so there were fewer people frequenting this area. On her second day at Border Town, she was dragged around by Irene once. If the knight had not said that today there was a new rare product on sale, she would rather have gone to the pub to drink two cups of iced wine.

After their identity registration finished, the two of them stepped into the boutique area. Here, the way of sale was also very strange, the whole market had only one entrance, and all the goods were placed on shelves from where you could freely choose them for yourself. They didn't accept bargaining, and no one tried to boast about the products. Instead, the prices and commodity introductions were written down on a parchment stuck to their side, after picking their favored items, they had to pay at the door.

May noted that the first row on the left had dozens of colored cups, which had the same pattern as she had seen last time, indicating that within one month's these cups have not been sold at all. In case they were ordinary businessmen, they would be making make a loss.

So, she asked, "Was this market truly opened by His Royal Highness?"

"Yes," Carter nodded, "Because of this, you can see some incredible merchandises." While speaking, he went to the third row of shelves, "Such as this."

“This... was the new rare commodity you were speaking about?” May followed the Knight and came to a stop at his side, only to see five or six light yellow boxes on top of the shelf, each was about palm-sized and she couldn’t see what use they had at this time.

“This, however, is something His Highness had created himself, and now the castle’s witches – cough, I mean attendants and personal guards, are all using it. Using it during the bath, you can easily remove the difficult to clean grease. After washing with it, you will experience a new kind of freshness. Furthermore, it will also give your body the fragrance of roses. I dare to swear, that when taking a shower; there is nothing more magical than this. “The Knight solemnly vowed.

May turned her eyes aside to look at the parchment, only to see that on top of the tag stood two words: Perfumed Soap.

Chapter 210 - Go Or Stay

“Perfumed Soap?” She picked one block up and placed it near her nose to smell it, and indeed, she could make out the fragrance of roses.

“Yes, it is tough to imagine that to manufacture it, you begin with a thick paste, into which His Royal Highness also added perfume, to make it full of fragrance.

May once more subconsciously glanced at the price written on the parchment, with a selling price of 25 silver royals for one block it could be seen as a luxury product, but compared to even more expensive perfumes, the price was clearly set too low.

“Are you sure that it’s perfume? When I’d performed in King’s City, there was once a powerful nobleman who gave me three bottles of perfume. Each of those bottles of perfume was only the size of the thumb, but their price was still more than five gold royals. For such a large piece of soap, you have at least add half a bottle of it, right?”

“Is that so?” Carter got startled, “Perfume is actually so expensive?”

“Of course,” May gave him a look, “It is one of King’s City Alchemy Association proudest products, except for crystal glass, perfume is their best selling product. I’d heard from other people, that besides the tribute to the Royal Family, they were able to let nearly one thousand bottles flow into the market each year.

Individuals who can afford such a luxury belong to the upper nobility or are wealthy merchants. In case I hadn't gotten it as present, it would be absolutely unlikely that I would ever purchase a bottle of perfume, which costs as much as my salary from several plays."

"But I have seen how His Royal Highness has used the perfume, and it didn't seem to be a rare material...ah... listening to him, it appeared to be made out of sugar cane?" Seeing the puzzled look on May's face, Carter added, "A sugar cane is just like a sweet stick, it is a typical crop of the Fjords, which looks like a stick. When you bite into it, you get a mouthful of sweet water. Currently, it is only planted in the castle's backyard, but next time when I see His Royal Highness, I will ask him if I can take one out."

Once again, it was His Highness the Prince... Since May had come to this town, the name she had heard the most of was Ronald Wimbledon. Whether it was Irene or Carter, whenever they talked about the changes happening in Border Town, they would always mention him. It seemed that His Highness was omniscient and there was nothing he didn't know. Furthermore, all of these new things had been created by him.

Does there really exist such a learned person in the world? She couldn't believe it, after all, even if they were smart, learning all this knowledge would still require time. Whether it was in King's City or Longsong Stronghold, the people that were recognized as scholars were all old men with white hair. The folk of the Western Territory even had the phrase, 'The longer the beard, the broader the knowledge'. But the Prince was only twenty years old, so how could it be that he knew all these things?

Even when thinking this way, May's face still showed her usual expression, "No, if it could be used to make perfume, it has to be a very rare crop. Especially the perfume formula, that could be sold to any Alchemic workshop for an incredibly high price. You must never make discreet inquiries about this to His Highness, even in case you see it, you shouldn't speak about it."

"All right," Carter said and took a handkerchief, putting four pieces of soap into it.

"Will you really buy so many of them?"

"The most a person can buy are two of these. So we will pretend to buy them separately and when we leave I will give them all to you – let's first leave before you start disagreeing." The knight raised his hand to interrupt May who wanted to say something, "When I use mine up, I can still go to His Highness to ask for new ones, but when they are sold out here, you never know when they will get new goods. So, by taking these four, you can use them for a very long time."

When May saw her counterpart's serious expression, it seemed as if her heart suddenly started burning. And for a long time, she just pursed her lips, not saying another word, just silently watched how the knight wrap up the perfume soap.

"Since we are already here let's look at some other commodities," he laughingly said as he held the bundle.

When she returned to her “home” in Border Town, the outside skies had already become dim.

The last light of the day falling through the curtain decorated the room with a touch of orange.

Since she had stayed to perform the second drama, May had received the same set of rooms as Irene. Although it wasn't very large, it was still fully furnished.

After placing the novelty goods she'd bought from the convention market one by one on the table, there was in addition to the four perfumed soaps along with a bottle of wine.

This bottle of wine and the common wine found in pubs were different. It had almost no color and was instead pure and transparent with no difference to water. She remembered that according to the products description it was called White Liquor, having a higher concentration of alcohol, it wasn't suitable to be ingested in larger amounts.

‘White Liquor’, she smiled, looking at it from its outer appearance, it really suited its name.

Pulling out the wooden cork, May poured herself a cup. Raising the cup, a burst of flavor hit her face and entered her nose directly, making her frown. However, after the first strong scent, a bouquet of delicious flavors entered her nose, they were sweet and mellow, not like the inferior watered wine from the taverns.

As a result of devoting herself to acting and the high amount of attention that gathered, May seldom went to the pubs. When a play became a great success, and the theater collective went to celebrate, only then would she follow them to go drink two cups of wine. Making sure that she never reached the state of becoming drunk where she'd be unable to speak as she had witnessed numerous actors who got so drunk that they forgot all sense of self-control. Instead, she was always controlling her drinking so that it would never affect her mind.

However, today May had a strong impulse to want to get drunk. Otherwise, she would have never bought such expensive Liquor against Carter's advice. Wanting to try the story she had heard from other actors, that when they got drunk, they would be able to shield of all distraction and concerns, seeing the true answer that lay at the bottom of their heart.

May closed his eyes, raised the cup to her head and poured the drink into her mouth. Immediately a hot spicy sensation exploded in her throat, causing her to directly spurt out the liquor again, and to cough out until tears arose.

Hell, is this thing really wine?

Waiting until the burning sensation had completely faded, she bit her lip and tried once more – this round; she only dared to take a sip of the liquor. Once again, a spicy flavor appeared, but this time it was followed by an intense richness and mellowness when those two flavors mixed together, she actually couldn't say if it was a good drink, but it brought a kind of strange sensation with it.

Around a quarter of an hour later, May felt a dizzy feeling overlaying her mind.

She took a fist-sized box from her pocket and opened its lid, and saw herself in a bright mirror. This mirror was different from her previous bronze mirrors or the thin silver mirrors, its surface was smooth without a scratch and her reflection was very clear, presumably making it very valuable. Within this mirror, May could see her flushed cheeks and her confused eyes.

It was a gift given by the Knight as they parted, she'd wanted to refuse, but the other side had turned away so fast that he hadn't given her the opportunity to give it back. As he walked away, he once more turned around and waved goodbye to her.

Speaking earnestly, when Carter Lannis shut his mouth, his appearance can absolutely be regarded as being impeccable. But if he wasn't such a chatterbox, I might not have stayed behind.

So, should she really take root here? Far away from the bustling city, starting once more in this remote town, where beside the few people in the crew, no one else knew her identity... The fear of the unknown only made it harder for her to make up her mind.

May put the letter on the table she had received several days ago, and spread it out – it had been forwarded to her by the Prince and Irene, the writer was Longsong Manager Petrov. From the letter, she learned that the stronghold theater had announced that her current whereabouts were unknown and that Petrov hoped that she would soon return to Longsong Stronghold to continue her performance.

His Highness the Prince hadn't concealed this news and instead given her the right to choose.

After draining the rest of the cup, May's vision gradually became dizzy.

She staggered to the desk, spread out a piece of paper and began writing a reply.

Within her overlapping surging train of thoughts, she saw the stronghold theater, Irene, Ferlin Eltek, the thundering cheer of the crowd in the town square, and those third-rate actors who lost their self-control after performing together with her. Eventually, these images all slowly faded, leaving only the memory of Carter Lannis behind, as he invited her with a grin.

“Hello, Miss May, may I have a drink with you?”

Chapter 211 - Light Industry

Roland sat at his desk and was reading with great interest through the recent report of the First Army from his Chief Knight.

Compared to his meticulous appearance from several months ago, nowadays Carter's iceberg like face often carried some other emotions, letting him appear much less calm, and instead giving him an aura of expectation and eagerness.

Most probably this has something to do with the Star of the West, Roland thought.

About the event of Carter's and May's recent stroll, Roland had also heard about it. After all, as one of the top members of the First Army, he also represented the Army, so every movement would naturally be noticed. Not to mention May, the woman walking at his side, belonged to the kind that would draw the attention of all men to herself.

When they had appeared side by side on the streets of Border Town for the first time, his guards had immediately passed along the news to his ears.

Regarding this kind of matter, Roland didn't really mind it. Carter was roughly two to three years older than he was. So it was reasonable to say that it was a strange that he still wasn't married. And if he could actually find his other half in the Western Territory it wasn't that bad, as long as it didn't interfere with his work.

According to the Knight's report, the First Army had been equipped with about 200 revolving rifles, adding almost a dozen with every day – in fact, if the raw materials were sufficient, Anna's production capacity could be increased by several times. But at the same time she was also in charge of refining the pig iron into steel and manufacturing the steam engine, which was slowing her down.

However, this speed was still acceptable. After all, the First Army was only 600 people strong, so another one and a half month would be enough to entirely replace all their weapons. Furthermore, before the next expansion of the population, the military's size couldn't be further expanded anyway.

Another point of the report was the formation of the Second Army.

In order to make the training convenient as well as maintain their secrecy, Roland had the people recruited from Longsong Stronghold all incorporated into the second army. Currently, they were all undergoing disciplinary training, which followed the same pattern as the military's training. Then it would be time for ideological education in the evening, in the attempt to let these people as soon as possible think of themselves as the protector of the Western Territory, implanting in them the belief that their loved ones' safety needed to be protected by them.

“At present, the training of the Second Army is progressing well. The current estimation is that they should be ready to start with the shooting practice in a week. By that time, enough weapons

should have been replaced making it possible to have a flintlock to match every hand.” Carter concluded.

This was the advantage of guns. To train a cold weapon soldier, at least one year’s time was needed. To teach a knight, five or six years had to be spent on training. While soldiers equipped with guns could already be dispatched on military missions after only a month of training. Furthermore, the longer a battle lasted, the bigger advantage of firearms became – after all, pulling a trigger was much safer than fighting with a sword.

“During the shooting practice, the supervisors have to pay attention to the number of guns, how many have been given away and how many of them come back. The same applied to the gunpowder, when it was distributed for the training, the veterans of the First Army would be responsible for its supervision.

“Yes,” he nodded.

“Very well,” Roland dismissed him with a wave. “That is all. You must be busy now as well.”

“Uh, Your Highness...” Carter hesitated. “Last time you said that the perfume mixed with the soap was made out of sugar cane, was that true?”

“Yes,” the Prince said, sitting up in his chair. “What’s the matter?”

“That sugarcane, is it expensive?”

“No... they are just some common crops.”

“I’ve heard people say that a thumb-sized bottle of perfume could be sold for five gold royals in King’s City,” Carter scratched his head, “If this is the case, shouldn’t manufacturing the sugarcane perfume bring a huge income to the town?”

“Five gold royals?” Roland got startled! He had never considered this point. Recalling the previous life in the palace, the 4th Prince had never cared about the price of commodities, it was even more the case with perfume, something with which he had less contact. Only women would prefer a trinket that only delivered a nice fragrance.

His initial motivation to make perfume was his wish for fine perfumed soap. Otherwise, by only having running water and no bathroom soap, it felt like there was something that was missing. Ah, the sensation of having his whole body covered with bubbles.

If a small bottle of perfume could be sold for several gold royals, it was indeed a pretty good business idea. Unlike coated mirrors, the raw material of sugar cane and flowers were much cheaper than crystal glass was.

Thinking it through, Roland laughed, “This idea isn’t bad, I will consider it.”

“His Royal Highness, the... sugar cane, can I take one out of the castle with me?” asked the Knight with a look full of expectation.

“It won’t hurt,” hearing him speak in this manner, Roland could immediately guessed as to what he wanted to do with it. After all, this was the Western Border, unlike the Port of Clearwater, the crops of the Fjord’s were relatively rare here. So it was a good choice as a gift when asking a lady from the West out, “They are growing on a wall in the backyard, just pick some for yourself.”

“Thank you, Your Highness!” Carter saluted.

Afterward, Roland called for Barov – still calling him assistant minister wasn’t quite appropriate anymore. As City Hall’s number one figure, he was already regarded as Border Town’s Premier Minister.

After Barov took his place, Roland roughly described the perfume business plan, “Do you think this could be something we can earn large sums of gold with?”

He did not reply immediately, but later asked with wide open eyes, “Your Highness, are you sure that perfume is produced out of the sweet crops?”

“Don’t you also use the perfumed soap? The reason for it fragrance is that I had mixed the perfume inside,” Roland spread his hands out, “It is indeed true that these raw materials are of little value. But I never knew that the perfume in King’s City was so expensive until Carter brought it up.”

“Far more than that, your Highness!” Barov said excitedly, “Perfume is King’s City Alchemist Workshop’s top-secret product, every year there are approximately one thousand bottles, only a small part of it is sold in King’s City. The rest is sold to the others cities in Graycastle. There, they can raise the price by twenty to thirty percent, but in case they sell it to the Fjords or other Kingdoms, the price would almost be doubled. To prevent the merchants from making a profit out of the difference in prices, the association not only firmly controls the perfume prices in other places; they even assign all the merchants by themselves. So in case you could produce perfume, even if you only sold it to Redwater City or Fallen Dragon Ridge, you would definitely obtain a generous payback.”

“So, that’s how it was.”

Your twenty years serving as an assistant of the Finance Minister wasn’t for nothing, Roland thought, regarding the commodity prices and current market situation, Barov is indeed magnificent. With this information, Roland formed a preliminary plan in his mind.

There were many ways to make perfume, the simplest method was to mash the petals or herbs with unique flavors and let them soak inside alcohol, letting the alcohol dissolve the plants, and leaving an aromatic oil remaining. Lastly, the remaining remnants will be filtered out and diluted with water.

The alcohol came from the juice of the sugar cane; while for the aromatic oil they could use roses, or the more commonly rosemary

and vanilla. However, since it was necessary to achieve mass production, the best choice would be to let Leaves use her magic to transform a plant to directly secreting this fragrant oil.

In addition to perfume, the industry could also produce white sugar and liquor. Also, a lot of consumables would be needed, and their profit would be less than what was gained from the perfume, but if sold to the town's people at a low price, it would enrich their diet, which could be regarded as a significant step forward for the people's welfare.

Roland's main reason for the slow development of the light industry was due to the shortage of a workforce, and the difficult to earn high profits with a small-scale production of daily necessities. Because of this, a limited population investing into heavy industry production, would be the most cost-effective approach.

Since the manufacture of perfume was incredibly profitable, maybe he could take advantage of this opportunity to make up for the shortcoming in environment.

Chapter 212 - Caravan And New Information

It was already the second month of summer, and as scheduled, Margaret arrived on the day of midsummer.

This time, the amount of ships brought by the business group was far more than the pier could accommodate, so many boats now had to dock by the river and wait for the other ships that were in front of them to finish unloading, and allow them to access the pier for themselves.

This caused Roland to realize that the town's pier would have to be expanded.

This month, Graycastle Industrial Company has finally completed their task, by reducing the scrapping rate to forty percent, they had successfully produced three steam engines for the day of delivery. Although compared to the current third generation used in Border town, the ones the factory produced for foreign trade were lacking in power, leaked air, were noisy, rattled and had other aspects that made them of a much lower quality. But compared to the former number of produced machines, it was still a great deal of progress.

The Crescent Moon Bay Caravan brought an artisan team of three hundred as had been arranged. Roland placed all of them in the industrial park at the southern side of the Redwater River. In addition to building a new wooden factory besides the original plant, he also ordered Karl to build an employee dormitory near the river. So that they could finish these facilities within a month,

all the the huge logs needed were transported to the scene and then cut by Anna along with Karl's technical guidance. Like this, the originally most time consuming task of processing the wood was completed in just two days.

When Teacher Karl saw Anna's new ability, he was stunned, in just six months, this weak and quiet girl had become so self-confident and seemed to always be in high spirits.

At the castle, Roland held a sumptuous dinner, welcoming the arrival of the business group.

At the same time, it was also the first time that White Liquor appeared in their line of sight.

"Every time we come here you will have developed new stuff, Margaret really did not lie to me," Hogg yelled, "even the wine is so out of the ordinary...this..."

"White Liquor," Margaret reminded.

"Yes, white liquor! Compared with this, ale and wine are absolutely bland and tasteless," and with a grin, Hogg tossed the cup of liquor down. "Your Highness, this stuff, you must sell me a few boxes of it."

"I think its flavor is too hot, or to say it differently, the fruit wine is more suitable for me," the businesswoman smiled and shook her head.

Roland smiled, “That has to do with personal preferences, the high concentration of distilled liquor isn’t with everyone taste. I also don’t plan to spread it out, but since I happened to have made some, I thought I could let everyone have a taste.”

In this era, brewing and drinking wine was still the mainstream, but distilling alcohol clearly offered a great potential to open up a new market. Like the White Liquor, Rum, Whiskey, and Vodka were all distilled spirits with higher alcohol content. And together with these distilled spirits, they also came the corresponding string attached to the bartending culture. However, for the present, it was still too early to open up this industry in Border Town.

“Your Highness, I have brought some news with me according the matter you mentioned in your previous letter,” Margaret began, “Now, after the Church has taken over the Kingdom of Endless Winter, they haven’t brought up many changes. Currently they are facing a very strong resistance of the Wolfsheart Kingdom. Because of this they have gathered all their troops at the Broken Tooth Castle, but even with them, they have not been able to take a step forward during the last two months. In addition, the Kingdom of Dawn has sent a message to Graycastle, that the Church goal should be to eliminate the witches, instead they want to take over the Four Kingdoms. They suggested that the two countries should establish an alliance, expelling the forces of Church out of the kingdom, and jointly fighting against the Holy City of Hermes.”

“How did the King’s City respond?” Roland asked

“The Kingdom’s Prime Minister, Marquis Wyke, has immediately refused this proposal, and even denounced the other side for speaking nonsense.” Margaret shrugged her shoulders, “This matter has caused a large commotion in King’s City. Even the nobility is unable to reach a consistent view. As far as I know, many people are in support of the idea of an alliance. After all, at present, the Church hasn’t shown a sign that they will return the sovereignty to the successor to the Kingdom of Eternal Winter.

“Did Timothy not step forward?”

“The answer was certainly to incite Timothy, who, at the moment, is rushing with his army to the East,” Margaret showed a somewhat dignified expression.

“I heard that there was a massive fleet east of the Seawind Region, which attacked and looted the eastern coast. They stopped at nothing, even the churches hadn’t been spared and there were also many merchants of the Fjords who met with disaster.”

“Many people have now become fugitives in the Eastern Region, Hogg and I have already given shelter to many of them.”

Margaret then added, “They said that the looters were no longer only snatching just money. Nowadays they are even taking people with them, and after everything that could be moved was taken, they would burn everything that was left down. It seems that they want to turn the whole eastern territory into a white land. This is absolutely a severe blow to the eastern aristocracy who had recently been subdued by Timothy.”

Normally, hearing that Timothy was suffering under massive attack should be a joyous message, but when he heard that the other side even captured the population, Roland's heart was hit by waves of pain, "Those who were able to escape..."

"Are you interested in them?" Margaret lightly smiled, "After reading the letter, I already guessed that you might want to buy a large number of slaves to enrich the workforce in your territory. However, compared with the foreign refugees from the Kingdom of Endless Winter and the Wolfsheart Kingdom, the refugees of Graycastle may not be willing to sell themselves into slavery.

"I do not need them as slaves. As long as these people are willing to come to Border Town and settle down, there will be food and housing for them, and they will also be paid for their labour." Roland corrected, he also realized that this was a good opportunity to expand his number of people, even though the news arrived slightly late. "How many people are there?"

"Most of the robust and powerful refugees have already been taken in by the nobility and caravans, but there should still be nearly ten thousand people gathered outside of King's City, however, most of them are younglings or women."

"Well, I'll still send someone on the way to screen them," the Prince said. "In case I want to take them, do I need to deal with the officials of King's City?"

"No, you don't," Margaret waved her hand to emphasise her

words, “They will be ever grateful to have someone take those people away. Otherwise the food they have won’t be enough. In the event that the number continues to increase, it might even become possible that the food shortage could lead to riots.”

After the dinner, Roland returned to his office and called for Theo, his personal guard.

This incident made him aware of how backwards his intelligence system currently was. If he had received knowledge about the refugee problem immediately, he could have done the preparations earlier. In the end, allowing him to bring even more people to Border Town. At present, his understanding of the outside world laid only on the information he got from the caravans that arrived once a month, and a rate like that was simply unable to meet with his demands.

Even with his stationed army in Longsong Stronghold, which had been established as a relay post, he could only monitor the Western Region. If he really wanted to compete for the throne of Graycastle, he would have to extend his intelligence network to cover the whole kingdom, or even better, the whole of the mainland.

Right now, Roland did not have a sufficient number of loyal and devoted subordinates that he could use to establish a complete intelligence network, not to mention sending spies to all parts of the country to work as his secret agents. Therefore, he first started with laying down the foundation by sending some people over to King’s City, and let them collect information from the city and the

outer regions. It wasn't needed that they start with detailed monitoring, but this way he could still at least receive a rough understanding of the overall situation and wouldn't have to be passive any longer as with today.

Being aware of Theo's influence on King's City's black street rats, the prince knew that he was the best candidate for the job.

"You want me to follow the caravan to King's City?" Theo gawked in disbelief.

"That's right; you will have two duties. Your first mission is to meet up with the refugees of the Eastern Region. I will send a group of one hundred or so soldiers with you who will be in charge of the escorting them back to Border Town. I will inform you later about the specific conditions of the screening, but that will still be before the caravan leaves.

"Yes!"

"Second, when the flood of refugees has calmed down, you will stay behind in King's City and start to collect information from everywhere in the city for me. Since you're already used to dealing with the underground rats, you should be clear about how you have to go through with it. Furthermore, Margaret's caravan will be fully supporting you, in case a task requires you to spend some money you can go to her. Compared with your task of going to Redwater City to spread the news about the witches, this time your funds will have no upper limit." He then put a revolver on the table, "Pay attention, and protect yourself, I hope that I to hear some good news from you soon."

Chapter 213 - The Paddler Blueprint

Four days later, the merchant fleet set sails leaving the docks.

Theo and one hundred members of the First Army went along with the ship, setting out to King's City.

During these days, Roland and Margaret had come to an agreement, Theo could come to her shop to request any amount of gold royals. The amount would then be deducted from the price of the steam engines, in addition, Roland also needed to pay an additional one percent of interest.

This time the amount of saltpeter and ore was two times that of the previous transport, but with the deposit for the transformation of steamboats, Roland had still received more than 2200 gold royals. Which was a monthly sales income Ronald almost wouldn't even dare to dream of during the Months of Demons – even by selling one month of ore, he would also only have gotten an income of three hundred gold royals.

When the caravan had left, Maggie's day for temporarily leaving Border Town had also arrived.

In accordance with the agreement made with Ashes, she would travel to the islands in the Fjords, bringing them news about the West.

Roland wrote an especially long letter which Maggie had to take along. In addition to expressing his wish for cooperation, he hoped

that the 5th Princess could dispatch some auxiliary witches who could come and help him. In the letter, he did not address himself as her brother but as the Lord of Border Town and now, after killing Duke Ryan, Lord of the Western Territory. Although the possibility that the other side would go along with his requests was minuscule, he still wanted to give it a try – anyway, spending some time writing a few more words wasn't an effort at all.

The farewell took place in the castle's backyard, all of the witches were present.

Nightingale gave her a small bag of dried fish; while Lightning gave her a package of ground pepper.

The other witches were also reluctant to part, they all stepped forward to caress and stroke her feathers, and hugged her goodbye – acting the same as if it was time for a battle and they could be parted forever.

“Rest assured, goo,” Maggie said, raising her head. “I'll be back soon, goo!”

“What if Tilly does not allow you to come back?” Lightning asked worriedly.

“Goo...” The pigeon shrank her neck and pondered over it for a while, then shook her feathers. “In that case, I'll just sneak back, goo!”

“Then we have come to an agreement,” the little girl promised earnestly,

“If you come back, I’ll personally catch a bunch of birds and roast them for you to eat. There is also the honeycomb we discovered last time; I will wait for you to come back so that we can pull it out together.”

“Goo!” She nodded again and again, “has reached an agreement goo!”

What good words could I say? Roland standing at the side was also overtaken with emotion. It has only been a month, but Maggie has already become one of us. Well done, Lightning!

“Well, Goodbye everyone goo!” Maggie flapped her big wings, after running a few steps she slowly rose up, circled them two times then gradually disappeared into southeastern horizon.

“She will reach the island smoothly.” When Roland saw the small point slowly disappear, he couldn’t help but worry about her.

“Yes, there won’t be any problems,” Lightning agreed without hesitation, then crooked her head, “there shouldn’t be... right?”

After sending Maggie away, Roland quickly went back inside, busying himself with the daily work.

This time, he wanted to draw the complete set of plans for the

conversion of the two ships for the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan – they would be the world’s first steam-powered paddle-ships.

Due to them using a single power source, it was not needed to change the trunk, directly connecting the steam powered paddle to the wheel. Using some roots to control the intake of the air pipeline, and with that also controlling the ship. To slow or stop the boat, it would only be needed to close the inlet pipe, while the excess steam would leak from the exhaust port. During the stopping procedure, the fire would still continue to burn, making it very easy to drive forward again.

The principle behind the plan wasn’t complicated, so Roland was able to draw out a rough model fairly quickly. In case he wanted to get an accurate production drawing, he would have to go to the dock to measure the precise size of the boats.

At this time, Anna entered the office, carrying a book.

“What’s going on?” Roland put the goose writing brush down while being unable to restrain a smile.

“I finished this book,” with this words she put the book with the title “Theoretical Foundation of Natural Science” down on his desk.

Seeing this, Roland’s smile suddenly became somewhat stiff; this was simply too exaggerated! Just within a few months, she was able to read the complete mathematical and physical knowledge of high school level? He didn’t even need to ask if his counterpart had

understood everything, because when Anna spoke of reading she meant complete understanding, or she would certainly take another look, or simply come to ask him.

“Are you drawing the blueprints for replacing the sail with a steam engine as a power source?” Anna’s attention was quickly attracted to the sketch laying on the table, “But...”

“But what?”

“Are these two wheels similar to rowing puddles? When they rotate, they can produce a pushing force, but half of them are exposed, which is a huge waste of power. So why not just completely immerse them in the water?”

“...” Roland stared at her with his mouth wide open, not knowing how to reply. Since people who are born with knowledge do not exist, does that mean, that just by looking at the sketches, she was able to make this judgment within these few moments? Thinking about this possibility suddenly rose his interest, “Then can you tell me how you would improve it?”

For a moment, Anna pondered about it, then she raised the brush and began to draw on the paper.

Roland supported his chin with his hand while appreciating with keen interest her carefully drawing attempt – her bangs fastened with his hair clip swayed back and forth with her every move. Her long slender eyelashes beat twice and her white cheeks revealed a natural rosy tint to them. Although, from this angle he could only

see the side of her face, but in contrast to the bright background, her profile from the bridge of her nose to her chin and on to the neck formed a perfect and gentle curve.

“Do you want to eat some fish?” Nightingale scrambled over and put her hands between the two.

“En,” Anna nodded and took the offered snack. “Thank you.”

When his line of sight was blocked, Roland coughed twice and then had to look back to those paintings on the desk once more.

Initially, Anna had tried to completely embed the wheel in the water. However, this method meant that it would become difficult to observe the wheel’s position when it came close to the shore, making it easy for it to hit the pier or the dock.

She then put the wheel at the back end of the ship – which was the standard practice, but with this, the transmission setting became much more complex, after all, the bulky steam engine was not suitable to be placed at the end of the hull. In that way, the drive shaft and gearbox would end up occupying quite a huge part of the hull.

When Roland saw drawings of her newest concept, he once again couldn’t help himself from exclaiming in admiration for his counterparts keen thinking capability.

The sketch Anna was currently considering came infinitesimally

close to the single-axis propeller layout; the steam engine was set at the bottom of the hull and the drive shaft extended out of the hull to below the waterline. To its end, she had connected four square blades, which gave it an appearance that was similar to a windmill.

“I do not know if it can be done this way,” she hesitated. “but, it’s reasonable to say that by keeping the paddle at tilt, it can produce horizontal pushing force. However, by reducing the wheel to our blades, I do not know if it can generate enough power to move the ship.”

“Of course it would be possible, it just needs a slight modification.” Roland took the quill out of Anna’s hand, and draw the propeller’s original design, “Compared to a windmill shape, this shape of the blade is more suitable for rotating within the water. Your train of thought is entirely correct, but the contractual requirement is to transform the ship into a paddler, so we will still keep with the first method – this has nothing to do with technology, it is simply a business strategy.” He paused and then asked, “I’m going to measure the hull, do you want to come with me? ”

Anna blinked her blue eyes, “Uh-huh!”

Mastering the theory and then putting it into practice, is the best way to learn.

“Nightingale?”

When Anna followed the Prince to the door, she saw that Nightingale was still looking at those blueprints on the table, making it unable for her to not open her mouth.

“Ah, you can go first, I’ll come around immediately.”

While holding the sketches in her hand, Nightingale repeatedly compared them, coming to the conclusion: Didn’t they just change the position where the wheel is placed?

Chapter 214 - The Travel To King's City

The merchant fleet followed a branch of the Redwater River on its way north and after passing Silver City, entered into the Grand Canal to King's City.

Theo remembered that he had once read in the “Chronicles of Graycastle” that two hundred years ago, everything around here had been a wasteland. In order to transport the mined silver in the nearby mines back to King's City, Wimbledon I had summoned stonemasons and nearly ten thousand handymen. After 20 time-consuming years spent digging, they finally opened a direct connection between the silver mines and King's City. However, during the construction process a new city had also gradually formed itself around the silver mines, which was then later named Silver City by the late king.

But the scene that unfolded itself in front of him was completely different from the view of 200 years ago; this was no longer a wasteland. Instead, both sides had now been covered with lush farmland, that slowly transformed itself into a village. Seeing this scene made Theo think of the Kingdom Avenue which connected Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. When that road was finished, he believed that the surroundings hills would also become more densely populated.

“I heard you that you have previously already lived in King's City?” Suddenly a woman's voice sounded from behind him.

When Theo turned his head, he saw that the voice belonged to Margaret, the owner of the caravan, he nodded, “Before I became a

palace guard, I have been living in the inner city.”

“How do you feel about returning to your old home?”

“Honestly speaking, not bad,” he said, “if it were not for the order of His Royal Highness, I’d rather stay in Border Town. Although King’s City seems to be such a lively place, it makes people develop a suffocating feeling living there.” Which is particularly the case because of the lower nobility, Theo thought.

“Is that so?” Margaret smiled, “how much do you know about His Highness Roland?”

“What’s going on?” Hearing this question let his heart slightly shiver with cold.

“I think he is really an incredible person. Of course, many bad rumors are flowing around in King’s City. You also should have heard a lot of them. However, in Border Town... it is nothing like those rumors said, his behavior and ideas are unpredictable,” she paused, “If the steam engine was accomplished through his knowledge and skills, why then, are even the soldiers trained by him so out of the ordinary?”

Speaking of the First Army, Theo glanced in the direction of the soldiers who were sitting on the deck – taking into account that their activities in King’s City had to be hidden as much as was possible; they were not equipped with guns, nor were they wearing a unified military uniform. Instead, their armor had been replaced with all sorts of different leather armors, and the only weapons

they carried were the wooden spears on their back, they looked just any other caravan guard. For most of them, it was the first time that they were away from the Western Territory, and because of this, they were all curiously looking around and talked with each other about what they saw, but no one had yet taken off his shoes or laid down on their arms.

On the other hand, the mercenaries of the caravan, to avoid the sun, many of them had left the deck and went into the cabin, leaving only three or four people behind on the deck, who in turn have taken off their shoes and laid flat in the shade with their hands stretched out beside their body.

“I am not quite clear,” Theo reluctantly answered. It wasn’t that he was trying to hide something, it was simply that he didn’t know the answer – after coming to Border Town, the 4th Prince had become very different compared to his former self, “Probably His Royal Highness from before was just a disguise.”

“Is it...?” Margaret said nothing more, keeping silent for a moment and then she suddenly reached out with her hand and pointed in the distance. “Look, that’s the city wall. We will be arriving soon.”

At the end of his field of vision, he could make out a fuzzy natural gray, just by standing here and looking, he could already feel the magnificence of the city walls – the city walls were the most outstanding work of the stonemason guild before they were dissolved. Both its height and thickness were second to none in the Kingdom of Graycastle. He had even heard that the walls had rooms and channels that offered places for nearly a thousand

soldiers to rest. Making it possible to guarantee an uninterrupted patrol and fast support.

When the walls became clear for Theo to see, the figures of the fugitives also entered his field of vision.

A large number of civilians had gathered in the outskirts of King's City. They had built simple sheds along the walls. In front of those sheds, many fires were burning, sending white smoke into the air, they were all seemingly boiling rice porridge. For now, these people had not yet run out of food, and their facial expressions were also still good. But King's City would certainly not support them with free food forever, as soon as the aristocrats had selected their workforce, they would send their troops to drive these people away.

“How do you plan to go through with your task?” Margaret asked curiously, “Will you sent out the soldiers given to you by His Highness to pull the people in by propaganda?”

“No, such a plan would have a low efficiency. Moreover, it would be very easy to come to the unwanted attention of others,” Theo shook his head. “If you want to get something done in King's City you either bribe an official or hire the rats, about this you should already have a profound understanding of.

“Sure,” she laughed, “I wanted to help you with one or two words, but it seems it is unnecessary. So, if there is a need for money, just come to me.” Margaret handed him a sign, “As long as you reveal this, one of my shop managers will immediately contact me. Of course, everything under 100 gold royals can be directly

taken.”

“Thank you.” Theo took the token – it was a deep red stone, engraved with some lines he had never seen before.

“There is no need to be so polite,” she chuckled. “The money will be repaid to me by His Highness, with interest.”

After arriving at the canal’s pier, Theo ordered the soldiers of the First Army to stay on the outskirts and wait for news of him. Their only current task was to avoid the sight of King’s City patrols as well as they could, while Theo himself entered the city together with the caravan. At the gate, he noted that the inspection of the guards had become a lot stricter than before. Apparently, they didn’t want any of the fugitives, who were able to escape from the East to enter the city.

After entering the city, the first thing that came to his eyes was a row of towering gallows.

Hanging on them were four women with their hands tied on their back, releasing an awful stench due to their expose to the scorching sun. Seeing such a scene let Theo immediately frown.

“Timothy is performing witch hunts in the city, and they are the unfortunates who get caught,” Margaret sighed, “but that is not accurate, of some of the witches the nobility just got bored, they just took advantage of this opportunity. It’s hard to say what is better, continuing to be imprisoned in a dark room without light, or being freed from the pain as soon as possible... No matter what,

I wish for them that they can rest in peace.”

During the last half year at Border Town, Theo had realized that witches were not as unforgivable as the Church had preached and that except for their strange abilities, there was no difference between them and ordinary people. Looking at the bodies of the women hanging on the gallows he could determine that the smallest had only been around fourteen to fifteen-years-old. When he realised this, it suddenly felt like as if his heart was being pressed together, immediately returning the suffocating feeling.

Apart from the refugees outside of King's City, little else had changed within half a year. Beside the main road which led to the city gate, that was paved with blue stones, all the other side roads and alleys were made out of mud. Now, under the hot summer sun the ground was covered with cracks, and whenever a carriage passed by a burst of yellow dust would rise up from it. It was hard to imagine that the capital city of the kingdom unexpectedly was outdone by the municipal constructions of a desolated small town just outside of the western border.

After crossing two streets, in one line the caravan entered the market area. Instead of following, Theo waved goodbye to Margaret and turned walking on his own into an alley.

Arriving at the familiar entrance of the “Covert Trumpeter” tavern, he immediately pushed the door open and went inside.

“Hey! The tavern will only open at night!” Someone shouted.

Theo ignored them and directly went to the bar, facing the strong man who busied himself, while earnestly wiping a wine glass. “Still remember me?”

“From under which stone did you jump up grasshopper, didn’t you hear that the pub only opens at night?” He impatiently put down the glass, raised his gloomy face, while two waiters also came over to encircle him, stopping their table and chair arranging, “Now I will count till three – Th-Sir Theo?”

“It’s me,” Theo spat to the side. “I have a good business deal I want to offer you.”

Chapter 215 - Skeleton Fingers

Theo was brought to the second floor of the small house. The brawny man had told the waiters to continue cleaning then shut the door.

These rooms were usually used to entertain those customers with special needs, but for only twenty-five copper royals a night, the environment wasn't very elegant. Within the room, there was an unpleasant moldy smelling and a narrow bed, with a bedding on top which was so crumpled as if it hadn't been washed or taken out to the sun to dry for a very long time. The cracked table was missing a corner and the cracks were filled with a black floccule, giving it a dirty and greasy appearance. But Theo was too lazy to care about all of this, he sat on the bedside, quietly waiting for the opposite party to start to talk.

“You have disappeared for quite a while,” the brawny man said with a grin. “Since Sir Naji has taken your seat, why didn't you have come to the tavern? Even if you are no longer in charge of this matter, you could still have come to drink a cup of wine with us, right?”

His nickname was Black Hammer. He was the watchman for the “Covert Trumpeter”, and one of skeleton fingers' member. His name sounded quite scary, but he was only one of King's City many street rats. To help each other, the rats had formed groups, divided the territory under their control, and according to their business operation they were either a huge and firm group or a loose organization. These underground organizations had more or less all had a noble or wealthy merchant as mastermind behind them and the skeleton fingers was no exception. But unlike a domestic

dog, most rats didn't choose to be loyal to only one person, as long as they became interested, they would work for everyone.

“Nonsense,” Theo said bluntly. “This night, you will call Hillwei, Swineherd, Silver Ring, and Pott into the tavern. I have something I need to get done.”

“These few are only the people of the Covert Trumpeter,” Black Hammer shouted out shocked, “Will they be enough?”

“I said, this is an excellent business opportunity.” He shrugged, “I have come looking for you since you have done a lot of things for me already.”

According to the usual procedure when dealing with street rats, the first step was to find the connector, and then it was the other party who determined whether they take up the task or not. When the two came to an agreement, the connector would delegate the task to the right person, and at the same time be in charge of the money.

Of course, during the whole process, they would make no contract or certificate which could be used as a guarantee, and ultimately, if they could achieve the desired result for the employer was also completely unknown. In general it could be said that the more prestigious organizations would care about their credibility, so their commission costs were also high, while the new organization would charge a lower price, but made it more likely to lose one's life and property in the process. In time, a delicate balance had been formed between the street rats and the city patrol, which together maintained an image of superficial

order inside of King's City.

Before Theo had entered the palace to become a palace guard, he had served as patrol, responsible for giving some task to the street rats to handle if they were inconvenient for the public to see. As a result, making it very clear to him which groups of street rats were the most powerful and what their share in King's City was, giving him the opportunity to eliminate the time taken to deal with the connector. As for the reason why he had chosen the skull fingers, that was because they weren't as thoroughly bad as the others.

"Can I ask you, whom are you working now?" Black Hammer asked after a moment of hesitation.

Theo didn't give him an answer. Instead, he simply pointed with his thumb into the direction of the palace behind him.

After leaving the patrol and rats, most people only knew that he had become a guard, but they didn't know that he was soon selected by Wimbledon III as the personal guard of the 4th Prince, following His Royal Highness to Border Town. Within his six months of disappearance, they should think that he had been working in the palace. Moreover, by just pointing to the direction of the palace, he hadn't lied – the royal family wasn't only Timothy, Roland Wimbledon was also a member of the royal family.

"I see," he nodded. "But Hillwei and Swineherd are gone, can I pick my own hands?"

“What happened to them?”

“Dead,” Black Hammer said full of hate, “Within last year’s winter, a conflict with the people of Dreamland Water arose, they had taken hold of poppy flowers and dying fern, selling it within the northern city district. Casas had led everyone to drive them back. During the fight, Hillwei got a knife to his neck, the blood simply could not be stopped from flowing, and Swineherd was also thrown into the canal.

Theo frowned, with such kind of thinks the patrol would bother themselves, from time to time they would even deliberately provoke the rats into biting each other in order to control their strength and quantity, so whenever one of them died, they wouldn’t care. “That’s all right, but remember, they must be the people of the tavern.”

Theo took a deep breath after leaving the Covert Trumpeter.

The moist and moldy smell in the pub made him want to vomit, only when his lungs were once more filled with the burning hot summer air was he able to disperse the dark and suffocating feeling.

Although Black Hammer had invited him to wait in the tavern, even claiming that he would come up with good wine to entertain him, Theo wasn’t willing to stay in that small place for too long. In the event that something unforeseen arose, he would be unable to react by the time he became aware of it.

After leaving the tavern, he decided to go to the inner city, and look for a reasonable Inn and reserve a room there for the night. As for the soldiers of the first army, they were already very skilled in setting up camp for the night, so there was no need for him to worry about them.

When night fell, Theo returned to the Convert Trumpeter.

At this time, the pub was doing its usual business, and from time to time a customer would enter or exit. For a while he just watched from the dark, waiting for the regular customers to come into the house.

As a low-grade tavern in the outer city, most of the visitors were commoners, so the drinks were also the cheap ale. Just ten copper royals was enough to drink several large cups in succession. Within the noisy surrounding, he quickly found Black Hammer's men; they were sitting around a table next to the wall and on top of their table laid a white phalange.

When Theo, calmly and collectedly walked over, a person immediately stood up to make a place for him.

"Good evening, Sir," Silver Ring and Pott greeted him with a nod.

"Let me introduce these two to you. This is Little Finger." Black Hammer patted the little woman beside him and then pointed at the young man opposite her, "And this one is Hill Fawkes, he only recently became a member of the Skeleton Fingers."

“Fawkes?” Theo’s eyes stopped on the opposite party, while the latter somewhat sparingly bowed his head in greeting.

“Within our line of work, there are only a few who have a family name,” Black Hammer laughed, “he had gambled until nothing was left. First, his wife ran away, then he even had to sell his house, after that he came to join the ranks of the street rats. He used to live in the Northern District and was an occasionally patron of the Covert Trumpeter.”

Silver Rings and Pott were old acquaintances, while Little Finger looked like any other child from the streets, but Hill Fawkes, Theo actually felt that there was something strange about him... yet, his appearance really resembled someone who had gone through such a drastic change of life, suffering physically and mentally. Yet, within his eyes, there was something, which Theo was unable to grasp, it was like... In the end, after thinking about it, he was still unable to get an answer.

Whatever, since he had been living in the Northern District and was a customer of the tavern, there shouldn’t be a problem. Furthermore, my first task it just to complete the transport of the fugitives, there isn’t any risk involved.

“Alright, now listen, the job you have to do isn’t complicated. The upper ranks don’t want to see that the number of fugitives who fled from the Eastern Region continues to increase. The grain reserves are becoming less and less every day, if it goes on like this, it is only a matter of time until riots start to break out, making it much harder to deal with them. Because of this, they thought of a

way to lure them away from King's City."

"What do you need us to do?" Black Hammer asked.

"It is very simple; you only have to spread the message that the wasteland in the West is being reclaimed and that the local Lords are willing to accept the fugitives. Moreover, a fleet with mercenaries has already set out to escort them back and will arrive in three days at the canal's pier. So, the only thing you need to do is to spread this message between those fools outside of the city. Feel free to add the specific details, the more attractive you make it appear, the better.

"But... If the appointed time for the fleet and mercenaries comes and they aren't there, saying all this will have no use ah." Silver Ring said.

"Of course, the escort will come," Theo smiled.

"Ah?" He got startled, "Is it really true that the Lords of the Western Region want to accept them?"

"You fool," Black Hammer gave him a slap on top of his head, "If you want to play such an act, you naturally have to go through with it. After they get escorted to the Western Region, do you believe they will be able to come back by only relying on their two feet? As for how to handle them afterward, let the local Lords get a headache about that." He looked to Theo, "This is indeed not a difficult task, but the reward..."

Theo raised two fingers, “Twice as much. My new employer has money, unlike the patrol. He just wants to see some results as quickly as possible, how much gold royals it will cost him, doesn’t matter to him.” He smiled, “Haven’t I told you already, that this is very a good business deal.”

Chapter 216 - Demonic Plague

During the following two days, Theo moved non-stop between Margaret's Chamber of Commerce and King's City's suburbs.

Margaret would provide the fleet for the transportation of the refugees while the First Army, who would be disguised as mercenaries, would arrive at the canal's pier at the appointed time to arrange the screening and embarking.

As for the dissemination of information, Theo wasn't worried that Black Hammer would handle such a task relaxedly after swallowing such attractive bait. Letting street rats do such work was much more convenient than giving it to outsiders. Although their range of activity was limited to the Northern District, the refugees would certainly spread the news amongst themselves. Furthermore, he couldn't handle them all at once anyway. Prior to this, His Royal Highness had explicitly explained to him that this was a task which could be done over time by sending one ship after another.

On the day of the fleet's arrival, nearly one thousand destitute and homeless people had come to the pier, much more than Theo had expected. If he had relied on the First Army to promote the journey, Theo believed that if 100 people had come, it would already have been considered a good result.

According to His Royal Highness's screening requirements, the children were allowed to embark on the ships first, followed by the children's families, and finally, the other adults. As for elderly citizens... Theo discovered that there were almost no people with

gray hair in the crowd. Perhaps they didn't want to risk going to a remote and unknown place, or they might have been unable to escape from the Eastern Region to King's City since the beginning .

After the first fleet of ten single-mast ships left the pier with 500 people on board, the rest of the waiting refugees were driven back to the camp, but they all took the news with them that "the fleet will return".

Thinking that he could easily succeed in completing the first of His Highness' tasks, he did not expect that he would encounter a severe problem soon after the merchant fleet brought away the second batch of people.

A strange illness had suddenly broken out in King's City.

The first deceased to be discovered had laid at the roadside, his body covered with many black spots, and his teeth fallen off. His skin had also broken open in many places, and the blood flowing out of those places had changed color – turning black like the blood of witches who were devoured by the terror of the demonic bite. But this time, the deceased was not a woman, but rather a male resident of the Northern District.

Not long after, several corpses with the same symptoms were discovered one after another. Furthermore, some of the people who came into contact with the corpses also began to grow dark spots. Whether it was herbal treatment or cold compresses, nothing was able to subdue the illness. Even when using bloodletting treatment, their blood which was usually red had now turned black, as if having been mixed with a large amount of ink.

Soon, fear spread through the masses, which steadily increased the amount of people who went to the Church to pray, but everything was useless. Every day, more and more people showing those black spots would appear, and even people with the same symptoms were discovered in the fugitives outside of the city.

Finally, the High Priest of the Church appeared in front of the praying masses and declared that all this was a plot by the witches to spread the Devil's power, infecting other innocent people this way. Furthermore, the priest said that at present, any treatment was unable to resist the power of the Devil, and the people who fall to the corrosion will die under extreme pain. However, the Church would never idly sit by; they had already developed the Holy Elixir, which was powerful enough to drive the Devil back to Hell.

This statement let the infected people once more see a glimmer of hope. Every day, they would sit in front of the church's door, waiting for the release of the Holy Elixir.

Although Theo had strong doubts regarding the Church's claims, he temporarily stopped the shipping off of the refugees to provide for every contingency.

"Why do you want to stop?" Black Hammer asked, extremely puzzled, "Why aren't we rushing to send those people away before they become eroded by the Devil's spirit? Do you want them to stay in the city to become seeds for the witches?"

"This is the wish of the people above," Theo answered

impatiently. “They are just ordinary fugitives. If the West is also infected by this evil force, how will the kingdom then look like?”

“Uh -” Black Hammer slightly stannered, “But what happens to the Western Region doesn’t matter to us at all. Sir Theo, how about this? We just don’t hear the opinion of the people above and simply drag them away. Think about it, this is such a demonic illness– one touch and you will become infected. I simply can’t stay here and wait for the devil to come, even if a wall is separating them from us.”

“As if we haven’t heard them?” Theo asked coldly. “Just like me, you also only have one head!”

After he left the pub, he went to the next shop marked with Margaret’s Caravan emblem, and revealed his token.

“I must see your boss. The sooner, the better.”

It didn’t take long until he could meet with the female merchant in a secret room of the shop.

“The disease definitely has nothing to do with the witches,” Margaret began, “If they could release such a demonic power, the God’s Stone of Retaliation would be powerless, and they would have already turned Hermes into a deadzone.

“I also think the same, but this is still a pressing matter that has to be reported to His Royal Highness. Although there have been no

symptoms of black spots on the two groups of people who embarked to Border Town, it seems that this disease does not manifest itself on the spot. In case some people on the ships were infected by this evil force, Border Town must prepare for it immediately.” Theo pulled a folded letter out of a pocket, “I need your help to send the message back to His Highness as quickly as possible.”

“Naturally,” she nodded. “Information transmission between merchants has always been the fastest.”

After several days of sailing, Lucia wanted to vomit.

During the past month, it seemed she had been always fleeing—first from the Eastern Region to King’s City, then from King’s City to the Western Region. The reason for the former was that she had been driven out of her home, while for the latter was because she had finally come to see a glimmer of hope again.

“Elder sister... water, I am thirsty...”

Bell gave a painful moan and reached out, grabbing Lucia’s arm.

“Alright, I’ll go and fetch you some water.”

Lucia grabbed the bag on hand and staggered out of the cabin, lying flat at the lowest point of the ship and reaching out with her arm to soak the bag in the river water. Her stomach acid bubbled

up again, in the end making it impossible for her to contain it, and with a wow sound the vomit flew out. She also spit the last of the gravel left in her stomach out, not only through her mouth, but also through her nostrils. She forcefully suppressed the urge to burst into tears, clenched her teeth, and rubbed her face with the back of her hand, then continued to soak the bag in the river. When the bag was finally filled with water, she carefully held it in her arms and trotted back to the cabin.

“The water is here, open your mouth.”

However, Bell’s face again appeared to be a bit worse than before. Her cheeks weren’t covered with their normal flush and her forehead was also terribly hot. She tightly clenched her lips, only intermittently releasing moaning noises.

With no other option than forcing her mouth open, Lucia twisted the water bag so that the water droplets would directly fall into her sister’s mouth.

“You are too close to her. The dark spots have already reached her neck, she cannot hold on for much longer.” A weak middle-aged man who was also in the cabin said, “We will die here, you have to think of yourself.

Shortly after they had left King’s City on the ship, some people had begun to suffer from a terrifying disease. First, their whole body would become unusually hot, followed by the emergence of dark spots on their skin. Within three to four days, the illness would begin to worsen. Not only had the infected fallen into a coma, but the people who came in contact with them also caught

the disease. Therefore, on the fifth day, the fleet had cleaned out a sailboat specifically for the transportation of the patients. Lucia guessed the reason why the other side hadn't just thrown the sick refugees into the river was because there were also some infected people on their side.

After the first dark spots were discovered on Bell's body, Lucia didn't listen to any discouraging words from others and decided that she would follow her younger sister onto the ship of sickness.

In order to take care of young Bell, she had almost not slept for an entire two days.

However, Lucia had still not given up. She believed that as long as they were able to reach the Western Region, all would change for the better.

If the rumors were right... the Witch Cooperation Association would be her final hope.

Chapter 217 - The Cause Of The Disease

Roland and the witches had finished, but just as he decided to return to his room and take an afternoon nap, Carter stormed into the dining hall.

“Your Royal Highness, the ships transporting the Eastern Region refugees from King’s City just arrived at the pier!”

“So fast?” It seems that Theo’s work efficiency is quite high, Roland thought, pleased, as a man who has relations to the black and white side of the society, his time serving in the patrol wasn’t wasted. However, when he looked at his sweating Chief Knight and saw his pressed brows, Roland immediately felt that there was something wrong.

“What happened?”

“The people on board have caught a strange disease,” Carter described the patient’s characteristics quickly. “At first, it was only a few individuals, but by now the disease has spread over two to three ships, even the soldiers of the First Army have been infected!”

An illness which causes black spots all over the body, which also spreads on contact? This sounds very similar to a plague, similar to the famous Black Death. However, the bubonic plague bacillus didn’t change the color of the infected’s blood, not to mention making their skin break apart.

Roland wrinkled his brow.

His first thought was Lily, but they had not fully grasped the scope of her new ability yet and making her handle an infectious diseases which had never been heard of before would be very dangerous. If she were unable to cure them, it would be quite probable that she would also get infected. So he had to make his decision very carefully, but according to Carter's description, it seemed that these people couldn't hold out for much longer.

In any case, at least I have to first blockade the area.

Thinking up to here, Roland ordered Carter, "Go and send out the First Army; they should set up a restricted area outside of the pier, forbidding anybody from entering or leaving it. Additionally, tell them that Miss Nana and I are also already on the way."

"Yes!"

"Is it going to be very difficult?" Nightingale asked.

"That's still unclear, everything depends on Lily's ability," he said. "Call all of the members of the Witch Union, there will be no afternoon naps today."

Through the whole journey to the pier, Roland thought about how to verify the effectiveness of Lily's ability while keeping her isolated from the patients.

Fortunately, her ability to protect freshness belonged to the summoning category, with a range of five meters like that of many other witches, it allowed her to use and efficiently control her ability over a distance without the need of actually touching the target.

Thus he brought two carpenters along, and with the help of Anna they quickly built a rectangle box. The room was split in the middle, and it was possible to see the opposite side through a window embedded within the barrier. Within the lower half of the wall two symmetrical holes were cut, on top of which Soraya had painted a flexible curtain, so that when Lily stretched her hands through the hole, the coating would tightly wrap around her hands. Furthermore, the soft sky colored curtain would also cut off the air circulation between the two rooms. With this, as long as she later washed her hands with alcohol, all possibility of being infected should be eliminated.

During all this, it were still the 100 soldiers of the First Army who maintained the order on top of the ships. That they were still able to uphold discipline wasn't due to their strong willpower, but because most of them believed that the angelic Miss Nana would certainly let them recover like she always had.

As soon as the box was prepared, one of the soldiers who had shown the black spots but could still walk was selected.

According to instructions he entered the room and stood still, Lily then stretched out her hands through the barrier, and made full use of her ability. At the same time, Roland stood beside her

and observed the soldier's situation through the window.

The magic power took effect silently, and when the little girl nodded, giving Roland the signal that she was done, he opened his mouth and asked, "How do you feel now?"

"Your Highness?" When the soldier heard Roland's voice, he excitedly raised his hand to salute, then froze on the spot, "Hey, I feel like my strength has been restored. Oh my God! Your Highness, I already feel much better now!"

Roland also saw that the dark spots on the soldier's hand were rapidly fading; this definitely isn't a plague symptom. If I remember it correctly, the soldier's black spots should have come from a complicated sepsis and a high degree of cyanosis. Even after killing the bubonic plague bacillus, these spots should have taken a long time before they faded away. After all, Lily doesn't possess the ability to heal.

However, her new ability had an effect on the unknown infection, which made Roland feel a little relieved.

"Once you have fully recovered, go and call for the other soldiers to come in. Let the next ten people enter, whether they show symptoms or not, they all have to come here for treatment."

"Yes! Your Highness," the soldier shouted, paused for a moment, then saluted again. "Thank you, Miss Nana."

“It wasn’t Miss Nana, this time the one who saved your life was Miss Lily,” Roland corrected him laughingly, “Only in the case of the illness already advancing so far that the skin has broken open, will you need Miss Nana to heal you.”

“Yes... well,” he touched his head. “Thank you, Miss Lily.”

By the time when the soldier had left, Lily glanced at the Prince, “I didn’t mind that he thought it had been Nana, I do not need to be thanked.”

Well, if that’s the case, why would you suddenly stand up so straight? When Roland looked at her and saw her swing her two ponytails, he couldn’t stop himself from rubbing her head, to which the other side unexpectedly didn’t show any sign of protest, but stifled a hum.

Since this wasn’t a plague, in the end, what is the cause of this disease? The moment he left the box, Nightingale appeared at his side and leaned over. “Your Royal Highness, I have just seen a strange phenomenon, the blood flowing out of their wounds... it contains signs of magic.”

“What?” Roland stopped shocked.

“Within the fog, it seems like I’m looking at the stars in the night,” Nightingale explained, “Until now, I’ve never seen such a tiny magic glow.”

This came unexpected. But as long as something involves magic it has to be closely followed up, not because of the witches, but because it means that the Church could likely be involved. Now, I'm at least sure of one thing. This disease wasn't caused by a natural bacteria or virus.

"I got it!" After thinking for a moment, the Prince continued, "Since it is like this, I have to get some drops of blood to observe."

"No, you may get infected!" Nightingale interrupted nervously.

"Rest assured," Roland smiled at her, "Lily's new ability has completely restrained the disease."

The blood samples had been taken from a coma patient, then he covered the glass slide with the blood and placed it on the stage, afterward adjusting the distance. When the scene through the lens gradually became apparent, he thought in case the symptoms were caused by something with only the size of a bacteria it may be that he couldn't see anything. But when the object came into focus, Roland could hardly believe his eyes.

Within the narrow line of sight, he saw a number of fat bugs with tentacles slowly moving through the blood, from time to time, they were spraying out some sort of mucus from their rear, which resembled thin hairs. Their size was nearly of the same dimension as single-celled algae, but just like Lily's mothers, their body wasn't transparent, making it difficult to distinguish between whether it belongs to a single-celled organism or not.

Fortunately, the magical glow of the bugs didn't affect the ability of the little girl, letting her mother's playing their role. When a copy was mixed into a sample of blood, it would even give priority to attacking those strange insects, and turn them into one of their own kind.

When all the soldiers of the First Army had been healed, to avoid any accidents, Roland ordered that all the fugitives when stepping into the box should wear a hood and would be led by the soldiers to help them enter. At the same time, another box was also set up, which was mainly there for Nana to treat the seriously ill patients with the open wounds.

The treatment continued from noon until evening, and when the more than five hundred people from the ten ships had fully recovered, the crowd burst into cheers. Many people kneeled on the ground, shouting one wave of "Long live His Highness" after the next, unable to quieten down for a long time.

"You don't seem to be happy?" The Nightingale winked at him.

"The one who cured the disease wasn't me, but Lily and Nana, who are witches," Roland shook his head. "They should be the ones to whom they cheer for."

Having said that, he, of course, knew that it wouldn't be wise to tell it to those who haven't fully accepted the witches. So he just sighed softly and hoped that one day witches could also come up to stand on stage.

It seemed that Nightingale could understand the thought within Roland's heart, she generously patted his shoulder and said, "It is unlikely that anyone cares about it, you have already done enough. Besides, the day will come sooner or later, won't it?" She paused for a moment "Well, there's a good news that I forgot to tell you."

"Which one?"

"There might soon be another member added to the Witch Union," Nightingale revealed with a grin.

Chapter 218 - Lucia

Bell's condition stabilized.

Like the time they had boarded the ship for the first time, they were once more arranged oddly. Those mercenaries armed with the wooden spears divided the people into smaller groups. Those whose life were in danger were the first to be carried into the strange room. Afterward, they took the young children, then they took families of the children and finally, it was the adults turn.

Lucia was placed together with Bell in the front of the row, the whole treatment process was handled very quickly, they blindfolded her sister, and two mercenaries grasped her under the arms and carried her into the cabin. She didn't have to wait for a long time before someone placed a pill in her hand. The pill was very small, and had a slightly sweet taste, at the same time the mercenaries also took the initiative to tell her that they had also fed the medicine to her sister so that she didn't need to worry.

When she was out of the room and could take off her hood, she was pleasantly surprised to see that Bells colors was improving at a visible speed. Although she was still in a coma, her forehead was no longer burning hot, the flush on her face had also faded, and the dark spots disappeared without a trace.

When all the people had been freed from their fear of their impending death, they felt like they had gained a new life and became so excited that they could no longer contain themselves after seeing the man with gray hair standing in the distance. They kneeled down and cheered, paying him the highest of respects.

From the mercenaries' mouth, they had heard that he was the Lord of this land, the one that was in charge of the Western Region, His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon.

Afterward, following exactly what had been promised in the rumors, the Lord not only lit bonfires at the edge of the pier, but also distributed meat porridge to everyone and told them that they would be paid and also received food and shelter as long as they were willing to work for the town. While everyone was enjoying the fragrant meat porridge, they were also talking about how fortunate it was that they had boarded the ships and fled to this Western Region, and then once more praised His Highness for his kindness.

Only Lucia felt a little anxious.

How can I get in touch with the Witch Cooperation Association? The secret message only said that a group of witches lived in Border Town. It didn't mention how I can find them. Most probably this important part had gotten lost during the transmission process, she had only faintly heard, that the news had been spread within the large cities of the kingdom's Central Region.

The moment when the people had filled their stomachs, and the mercenaries began guiding them to wooden sheds near the river, a woman's voice suddenly came from behind Lucia.

"Were you looking for us?"

She was so frightened that at the same time she turned her head she also jumped two steps forward, ready to escape, but when the speaker's appearance came into her eyes, Lucia couldn't help but be rooted to the spot.

Gosh, what a beautiful woman! Her long curly hair, illuminated by the gentle orange glow of the flickering flames, her eyes, twinkling bright as the stars, a sweet smile. But the most striking part was her aura, which wasn't inferior to that of any noble, as if she was an important person herself.

“My name is Nightingale. I'm a witch, welcome to the Border Town.”

Becoming aware of this feeling, Lucia was unable to stop herself from lowering her head “I... my name is Lucia White, I want to join you.”

“In that case, come with me,” Nightingale said with a smile, “I'll take you home.”

At this time, the sun had already fallen behind the mountains, only leaving a weak light behind. While carrying the sleeping Bell, Lucia slowly followed behind her.

“When was your time of awakening?” Nightingale suddenly asked.

“Awakening?” Lucia got started.

“That’s the moment when you got turned into a witch,” Nightingale explained. “From that moment on, your body will continue to gather magic, and because of that, we call this transformation ‘Awakening’.”

“I think... maybe two years ago,” Lucia recalled. “Is magic the power of demons?”

“That’s just the Church’s excuse nothing more,” she shook her head, “Magic is a ability given by God, it has nothing to do with good and evil. The so-called demonic bite is just the pain experienced when the magic within your body becomes too plentiful. This can easily be avoided with practice.”

“I do not need to bear that pain?” Lucia’s eyes grew wide.

“Yes, as long as there is no oppression of the Church, us witches don’t have to bear the pain of the bite.” Nightingale explained, “But here in our home, we can use our magic freely.” Then she pointed behind her, “Is this lovable fellow your younger sister? What about your other family?”

“They all died, only Bell and I could escape,” for a moment Lucia kept silent, “A group of people attacked Valencia, burning, looting, and killing everywhere. In order to resist them, father... His chest was pierced by several swords and mother made us run away quickly, in the end, she also, also...” The grief which had been enclosed within her heart for so long made it impossible for her to continue the sentence. All of the suffering, hunger, thirst, fear and

grievances, in short, the whole injustice she had to endure along the way, suddenly burst free.

For her sister, she had clenched her teeth and held on, but now, it seemed that the defense lines she had built around her heart was no longer able to block the emotional ups and downs from her thoughts. which quickly turned her sobbing into very loud cries. She knew that this wasn't a good time for it, that during the first meeting she should keep her courtesy, but the tears were like a storm, they couldn't get stopped.

She will hate me for this, right? She could feel how her tears and snot mixed together and her mouth began to taste salty. However, to Lucia's surprise, a pair of arms suddenly wrapped themselves around her, taking her into a warm hug, gently patting the back of her head. Taking completely no offense because of the dirt and tears on her face. Instead, she softly said: "Cry, cry now, it is fine to let it all out."

When Lucia's outburst finally calmed, she raised her head, only to see that Nightingale's shoulders had been soaked through with her tears.

"I'm sorry ..." she blushed.

"It doesn't matter, is it better now?" Then Nightingale took out a handkerchief and helped her to wipe her face clean, picked Bell up with one hand and held her in the other. "Let's go, there are still many sisters waiting to welcome you."

Lucia had thought that the witches' residence would be located somewhere in a small abandoned warehouse or basement, she never expected that Nightingale would bring her to the castle area, wasn't that the Lord's private territory? Even more surprisingly, the guards not only did not stop her, instead they also greeted her.

Could it be that the whole town is under the control of the Witch Cooperation Association?

Reaching the third floor of the castle, she walked into a brightly lit room, only to shockingly discover that the man sitting on the opposite side was the Lord who had recently received the cheers of the masses.

"This is the leader of the Witch Union, His Highness, Lord Roland Wimbledon. He took in the survivors of the Witch Cooperation Association, and also let spread the message to other cities, hoping to attract more homeless sisters," Nightingale introduced the man, "He made Border Town into the home of us witches. You do not need to doubt this point, after all, the people who treated your sister and all the other sick people on board of the ships were us witches."

Lucia's head had turned blank, she totally hadn't anticipated, that there would be a noble willing to provide a home for witches, instead of seeing them as tools or slaves. When her soul finally came back to her body, she began to panic and bowed in a flustered manner. Her bizarre posture was so out of shape, that Nightingale couldn't suppress her laugh, "Don't mind it, His Royal Highness does not care about etiquette."

“You came from the Eastern Territory?” The Lord’s voice was calm and relaxed, not giving her the impression of an interrogation, but more of a friendly chat.

Lucia stole a glance at him, seeing that he was sitting leisurely on his chair, and looked at her with an expression full of interest.

“Yes...”

As the conversation became deeper, and Nightingale supplemented some explanation, her mood gradually relaxed. Even though her counterpart was a noble, but he didn’t show an aggressive attitude, but rather the care of an elder.

“So, when your awakening was two years ago, you shouldn’t be an adult yet...” he spoke full of interest, “So, what is your ability?”

“Turning goods back into their original form,” Lucia said hesitatingly, “but it isn’t effective on all things.”

“Their original form?” His Royal Highness touched his chin in thought, he then pushed an beautiful cup to her over the table, “Can you demonstrate it for me?”

“This will destroy it.”

“It won’t hurt.”

Lucia nodded, went to the table and put her hand on top of the cup.

After a short while, the cup began to shrink and deform, ultimately forming into three distinct substances: The one on the far left looked like a pool of oil, dark and viscous. The one in the middle seemed to be a small cluster of fine black powder. Lastly, the one on the far right appeared to be clear water, which was slowly dripping down from the edge of the table.

Chapter 219 - Older Sister, Younger Sister

“Welcome to the Witch Union!” In the hall, a group of witches of different ages and colors raised their glasses cheerfully.

“Thanks, thank you.” Lucia felt her eyes become teary again, she sniffed and impulsively tried to restrain her tears. She raised her cup then drank a mouthful of wine, which didn’t taste as bitter as she remembered but was slightly sweet instead.

After having gone to see the Lord, and with Nightingale’s assistance, Lucia was able to wash Bell and take a bath herself. Afterward putting on a set of clean clothes. When her sister had been settled, Lucia once more followed Nightingale into the castle hall. Here, the witches had prepared a welcoming party for her.

This was the first time Lucia ever saw so many of her kind, subsequently also dispersing the last trace of doubt in the bottom of her heart. In case the witches had been imprisoned here or forced to serve the Lord, they would never be able to reveal such a light-hearted and bright smiles.

Recalling the sentence, Nightingale had previously said, “This is the home of witches”, she suddenly understood her feelings. In contrast to those witches whose identities were exposed and were thus hunted down and killed by the Church, finding a safe place to live in wasn’t easy. Since the bandits had attacked Valencia, a month of suffering and constant fleeing had followed. But now, with the warm welcome of the Witch Union, she could finally let her constantly alarmed mind relax a bit.

At the same time, she also realized how magical a banquet with many witches participating could become.

Using black flames, the raw goat's meat roasted perfectly within a flash, while the basin containing it was completely unharmed.

A little girl with short blond hair flew in the air, holding jug to fill everyone's cup.

While a witch with an exotic look simulated a broad range of musical instruments, which all eventually converged into beautiful music.

With Nightingale introducing them one after another, she was quickly able to remember each of their names. In this way becoming one of them and diluting the sadness in her heart even further.

In the Witch Union, there were mature and steady witches like Scroll and Wendy, and there was also Leaves and Echo, who kind of resembled older sisters, as well as Anna, Soraya, and others whose age was similar to her own. But no matter who they were, none of them treated her as a stranger. For this, Lucia's heart was filled with gratitude.

After the banquet, she and the witches wished each other a good night and then she returned to her new home. Although Bell was not a witch, the Prince did not order her and her sister to separate.

Instead, he gave them the last furnished guest room on the second floor of the castle all to them.

“Elder sister?” Hearing her moving, Bell opened her eyes.

“You awoke!?” Lucia felt immediately delighted in her heart, quickly rushing to the bedside, “How are you feeling?”

Bell looked like she had only been asleep for a long time, not having any trace of the plague or the pain it brought left on her body. With her eyes still a little cloudy, she opened her mouth and muttered: “I feel so hungry.”

“Wait...” Lucia hurriedly took out a bag from her pocket and opened it, releasing the scent of grilled fish. This bag of fish slices had previously been given to her by Nightingale, “There’s some food for you.”

Sitting on the bed and seeing how Bell ate the fish, she was so gratified that she began to pat the little fellow’s head. This year, her sister only just turned ten years old, and now, without parents, she was the only one Bell could rely on.

After eating two fishes she became more sober, curiously looking around she asked, “Where are we? It didn’t look like the ship had such a big bed.”

“Western Region’s Border Town, we reached our destination.”

“Have already arrived?” She touched her cheek. “But am I not... sick? Will they agree to let the plague-stricken people enter the town?”

“You are right, that would be indeed be unlikely,” replied Lucia. Seeing the blank expression on her sister’s face, she began to laugh, “However, the Lord’s witches have already cured you.” Afterward, she gave her a summary of what happened at the docks, “and from now on we should stay here in the castle.”

“Witches?” Bell asked, tilting her head, “Are they the same as you, sister?”

“That’s right. Furthermore, everyone is very kind to me, especially a witch called Nightingale,” Lucia softly poked her head. “She also helped with giving you a bath.”

“Oh, but you have always said that the nobles would loathe witches? Why would the Lord be willing to shelter witches?”

Taken aback by the question, Lucia coughed twice. “This... Occasionally there are also one or two good people within the nobility.”

While taking out the last piece of dried fish out of the bag, Bell asked. “Does that mean you need to work for him? Like those maids at home, sweeping the floor, cooking, and attending upon the Lord?”

“What nonsense are you talking about,” Lucia said, grasping her younger sister’s face, “I am a witch! It is only naturally that I have to help the Lord with my ability! As for maids having to do those things, who told you that?”

“Mommy...” she sadly whispered, “She said that’s also the reason why she never allowed daddy to recruit a beautiful maid.”

Hearing her mention their family, Lucia’s face suddenly darkened a lot. Instead of blaming Bell for bringing it up, she pulled her younger sister into a hug and softly sighed.

She wasn’t worried about her sister’s theory, during the conversation with the Lord, she could see that besides of simple inquiries about her life experiences, the only other thing of interest to him was her ability, making it evident that he cared more about whether a witch’s ability could serve useful to him or not.

But, when thinking about her ability, Lucia felt deeply worried and sick at heart.

She had never been ignorant about the witches’ world. She knew that six months ago, many witches had come through Valencia, and afterward, the others had, one after another, left the city. She had heard that they were leaving for the Fjord’s, wanting to find a new home. But Lucia didn’t want to leave her parents and because of that she hadn’t agreed to travel with them. However, with her repeated contact with them, Lucia at least became aware that witches are used to dividing themselves into combat and noncombat types.

Her ability to restore an object to its original state could be said to be useless. Not to mention using it during a fight, even using it during peaceful times it was already difficult for her to control.

Her father had been a merchant, operating the family's papermaking workshop, so it was often that the living room was filled with the prepared straw paper. But on the day when she became a witch, she unwittingly chanced upon using her ability, turning the paper back into a pile of grass and fine powder. After the event, although her parents severely rebuked her, they did not give her away to the Church. Instead, they repeatedly warned her to hide herself carefully and if necessary, even go so far as put on a God's Stone of Retaliation, disguising herself as devoted believer.

At first, Lucia was full of curiosity about the ability, often secretly hiding in her bedroom to restore all kinds of test items. But she quickly discovered that this ability was extremely difficult to control. For example, restoring the straw paper again, she sometimes got the same grass bits as the first time, but other times there were only black granule left. In case she would continue to cast her magic on an object, it will only become less and less, and the final product was not a fine powder but rather a grit, which meant that her restoration ability couldn't be used to restore a heavily damaged object. She was only able to destroy what other had carefully produced.

The other witches had also thought that her ability was useless. In case she wanted to use it in battle, she would have to get too close. Furthermore, her ability was also ineffective on a living body, so not to mention using it to fight against a trained knight, even the average farmer would already be terribly difficult. And

so, considering to become a combat witch was out of the question for her, but also as a noncombat witch, she couldn't think of any uses, it was almost like her ability was on the lowest level.

Coming to this conclusion, she had been depressed for a long time.

But now... what Lucia was now more anxious about was, if His Royal Highness also believed her to be useless, will he cast her out of the castle?

With an uneasy feeling, she blew out the candles, took her sister who was perfectly satisfied gnawing on the finished fish bones into her arms, slowly closed her eyes then awaited the arrival of a new day.

Chapter 220 - Decomposition And Restoration

Early on the next morning, Roland had filled the office floor with a variety of test items.

From solid to liquid, from minerals to ingots, from inorganic to organic matter, simply everything that should be here was here.

“It seems you are euphoric.” Nightingale squat down, took a small steamed dumpling from a meal plate and threw it into her mouth.

“Of course, there is a new witch in town, and even better, her ability is so incredible,” Roland rose his eyebrows. “Also, do not think that I didn’t see that, you just slyly ate one of the test objects.”

“There are still a few left,” Nightingale said while wiping her mouth. “Is Lucia’s ability really that useful?”

“It’s of the greatest usefulness, not matter if it’s decomposing or restoration, they both would bring significant improvement to the smelting and manufacturing industry.” Roland said excitedly, “In case she paired up with Anna, they could easily upgrade the machine’s strength by several times. Even if they couldn’t be mass produced, as long as they made several machines by hand, the level of the town’s production would definitely receive a qualitative improvement.”

Right now, the machines produced for Graycastle Industry by Anna are still working extremely accurately, but they were limited by the materials own flaws. During the production process, their abrasion and deformation problems would become increasingly evident. For example, seeing the cutting tool break into many pieces is a frequently observed phenomenon. If it wasn't for Anna supplementing maintenance parts, these machines could only be used for one or two years at most.

But if Lucia's uses her ability to control the parts the materials turn into precisely enough, it might be possible to use high strength iron, steel, and even alloy for manufacturing the machine tools. Not only would it increase the tool's lifetime, their processing efficiency and processing standard could take a step further. By then, items like the revolver rifle, which at the moment could only be produced by the Anna, would be able to enter the state of reaching mass production.

"Is it so?" Nightingale skipped back to the table, "But she does not seem to think so."

"Because she hasn't really recognized the value of her ability, it's the same with Mystery Moon." Roland further explained unconcerned, "When Lucia finished studying 'Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science,' she certainly won't think this way any longer."

"... " Nightingale kept silent. Not knowing how to reply, she instead put two dried fishes into her mouth.

When Lucia finished her breakfast and came to the office, her ability test officially began.

With his heart full of expectations, Roland followed closely how one test item after another changed and if there were any differences between them. For example substances like iron ingots and iron ore both changed into a silver-white granule, but when he took a closer look, he also discovered that at their edges there laid different kinds of powder. Grapes and meat didn't change at all, while the dumplings turned into water, flour, and meat residues.

When she was halfway through the test objects, she suddenly stopped and said with some embarrassment, "I seem to... have exhausted my magic."

Roland looked to Nightingale, only to see the latter nod. "The amount of magic her body stores is very small, it just looks like a cloud of drifting smoke, but it is for the first time that I see a color like hers."

"What kind of color?"

"... gray," Nightingale said.

Roland returned to his desk and waved to Lucia, calling her over, "The witch's magical capacity grows with their age and training. You are still not an adult, so being able to do so much is already quite good." Waiting until the young woman had walked to the table, he pushed the already prepared parchment over to her, "Since you decide to stay in Border Town, please sign this

contract.”

When Lucia came to the end of the contract, she couldn't help but grasp a mouthful of air, “A whole gold royal a month? Your Highness can... but my ability hasn't been thoroughly tested?”

“This has nothing to do with your ability,” Roland smiled and shook his head. “As long as you are a member of the Witch Union, this contract will always be effective.”

“Even in the case that the witch's ability is useless?” She asked in disbelief.

“You can also interpret it like that,” The Prince spread out his hands, “But I do believe that the power of any witch has its own unique use, it's only a matter of unleashing that power. So you really don't have to worry about being useless.” He paused, “Also, you should already have heard of the real reason for the demonic bite from the other witches. So to ensure that you can smoothly pass through your Day of Awakening, you have to practice your skill every day. After dinner, Teacher Scroll will give lessons in the living room; you also have to attend the lecture. Although you have already mastered your reading and writing skill, you still have to study Primary Mathematics and Natural Foundation.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Lucia nodded vigorously.

“You have a younger sister, right?” Roland asked with a smile. “When attending class, take her along with you, she should be at the right age for receiving an education.”

Lucia was slightly stunned, then, after raising her head to confirm that His Highness wasn't making fun of her, she happily bowed, "As you say."

After Lucia asked to be excused, Roland put the signed contract into the drawer, then thoughtfully looked at the broad range of test products on the ground.

"What is the result?" Nightingale asked curiously.

"Awe-inspiring," he said, picking up the plate with the steam dumplings, which now contained meat pieces and flour, "For example this... When kneading the flour, the gluten will form a ramified structure, letting the flour dough become strong but flexible. Once cooked, due to the high-temperature the gluten protein will denature, even when reground into powder, it is impossible to restore it to its previously smooth and exquisite appearance. This transformation is considered irreversible, but..." Roland pinched into the small cluster of powder in the palm of his hand, and felt a silky feeling, just like from freshly ground flour. "She was able to bring the meal back to its original appearance."

"Well, I can't say that I understand you," Nightingale curled her lips, "But putting it that way, can her ability be seen as restoring a material back to its original state?"

"It is not really like that," Roland pointed to the iron ingot. "In the case that it was merely restoration, the iron ingot should have been returned into iron ore, but in fact, it was broken down into

iron powder and other impurities.”

“... So in the end, what is her ability?” Nightingale asked confused.

“For the time being I still haven’t fully understood it, but if I had to speculate, I would say that her ability has two effects, as for its appearance, it manifests according to her knowledge and experience.”

“Knowledge and experience?”

“Essentially, there is no significant difference between meat and iron ore, they are both composed out of a variety of particles, but Lucia can only break down iron ore with her ability, but not the meat. I believe the reason for this is because she is unable to understand organic matter... or so to say, the constitution of life in general,” Roland explained, even though he wasn’t sure whether this was correct, he still had no doubt, that right now what Lucia needed the most was learning new knowledge.

Three days later, when the second convoy carrying refugees from the Eastern Region arrived at Border Town, the same disease had broken out on the ship. But this time it was much more severe, with almost half of the people being infected. After questioning some of the patients, Roland learned, that the black spots had appeared the first day after boarding. Which meant that they had been infected by the parasite earlier, and because of this the incubation period had been shortened a lot.

At the same time, Roland also received a letter sent from King's City, which was sealed with the mark of Margaret's Chamber of Commerce.

When reading the content of the letter, his brow wrinkled.

When the demonic disease spread through King's City, the Church declared that it was all a witch's conspiracy. They furthermore told the people that they had a Holy Elixir which could repel the evil spirits.

Furthermore, even outside of King's City, many ill people had started to appear, and because of this Theo had chosen to temporarily stop the delivery of fugitives.

If he wasn't calculating it wrong, the first fleet would return to King's City in four days, bringing with them the news that Border Town was able to cure the demonic plague. However, with nearly one week spent traveling, it would still be too late for those people who were already infected by the disease. Moreover, the public proclamation of the Church also had the smell of a conspiracy in the works.

After thinking it over again and again, he decided to send a small team to escort Lily to King's City. Otherwise, more than half of King's City population and the Eastern Regions' refugees would die, and those who survived in the end would become devoted believers of the Church.

Roland had to do his utmost to prevent the birth of that kind of situation.

Chapter 221 - Rescue Plan

Since he had decided on his course of action, the first question he faced was: Should he himself also travel to King's City?

This would be Border Town's first military operation away from the Western Region, and it would also be different than the two defensive wars prior to it. Certainly, they would come across unfamiliar environmental circumstances which could cause complications. Whether they could display their combat ability without a prepared battlefield, was still unknown. All this made it hard for him to feel relief in the event that he didn't go to King's City. On the one hand, he knew that his own military experience was extremely limited, but on the other, his understanding of war could still be regarded as the highest level for this era.

But the moment he left Border Town, the Western Region would become unclaimed land. If the message of this were to reach Longsong Stronghold. It would be a foolish hope to believe that Petrov could prevent all the other noble families from moving, trying to take advantage. As long as people were willing to disclose this information to Timothy, perhaps he would not care if he had to suffer a calamity at the front lines or in his backyard caused by the witches. But if he knew that Roland was near King's City it would be strange if he didn't assemble his army to encircle him. Even if it didn't come to that, even if Timothy let him off, as long as he commanded his soldiers to move from the Northern Region to the Western Region, Roland would be in an equally tight situation.

Generally speaking, compared with suffering a defeat at the frontline, a fire in one's own backyard was several times more

severe.

In the end, Roland decided to stay in Border Town.

After all, the First Army's primary task would be to protect the witches, while their second task would be to split the fugitives into small groups and let them onboard the ships. So rather than fearing an encounter with Timothy in King's City, it would be more likely that they would have to face the Church's Army of Judges. But as long as the rescue measures were carried out correctly, and nothing unexpected happened, they won't even need to let loose a single shot.

Of course, this meant that he would have to make sure that the rescue plan was as perfect as possible.

...

At noon that day, Roland called Carter, Iron Axe, Bryan and the members of the Witch Union over.

The 4th Prince only had some fuzzy childhood impressions of the land surrounding King's City, but this was a problem which could be easily solved, he asked Soraya to draw a simple map on top of the dining table in the living room. He then began giving Iron Axe and Brian their commands.

"This central square represents King's City and the blue line depicts the canal." Roland said while in thought, "You have two

tasks, the first is to protect the witches while they cure the fugitives, and afterward you are to bring them back to Border Town. Your second duty is to prevent the demonic plague from further spreading in King's City. For this, you should be aware that the epidemic is most likely being caused by the Church.

“Wh-What?” Brian was shocked, not daring to believe his ears. Carter raised his brows. While Iron Axe's expression didn't change at all, after all, he was a follower of the three Gods, just like the other Sand People were, and because of that he had no worship for the Church or any belief in their claims, which left Roland with a very pleased feeling towards him.

“After the Church's permanent annexation of the Kingdom of Endless Winter, they immediately started their attack on the Wolfsheart Kingdom. After they've conquered the Wolfsheart Kingdom, it is only a matter of time before the Kingdom of Dawn and Graycastle become their next goal. In fact, the whole Battle for the Throne is already by itself worthy of skepticism.”

The Prince went through the details how the Church was helping Timothy in the North, Garcia in the Southwest and himself by supplying them with the pills. “In the light of this information we can see that they aren't supporting who they think will be the next heir, but instead they are encouraging us to kill each other off. By swallowing their pills, it also becomes improbable that our soldiers will turn into veterans. On the contrary, after taking the pills, their whole body will become weak, and they will die a gruesome death. This time the same can be said about the disease. After the demonic disease has spread all over King's City, the Church will finally declare that they have the antidote, which ironically won't be distributed for the benefit of the people.”

“Only the light which shines in the darkest of places is the most dazzling,” Iron Axe opened his mouth.

“That’s right, if you want to be seen as a savior, you have to come to the people at their most painful moment. The stronger experience the contrast, the deeper will be their impression of the Church. As for the innocent who died in the middle of the road, those are merely the sacrifices whose belief was not sincere enough,” Roland stated. “So we will have to save the refugees from the East, but at the same time we also have to try to destroy the Church’s conspiracy.

After taking a deep breath to calm himself down, Brian asked, “How should we do that?”

“You have to hide as much as possible, trying to fulfill your duties in such a way that the other side doesn’t perceive you.” Roland points to a wide area on the outskirts of the canal, south of the pier, “Here, the land should be covered with crops, making it very suitable to hide at. There you should also find a high point, which allows you to establish lookout to scout out the pier. The soldiers responsible for providing support will disguise themselves as caravan guards once more and help the already treated people to get on board. I will write merchant Margaret a letter, asking her to provide me with as many ships as possible, not only the two fleets which are already involved with the transportation.

“Whether it is Longsong Stronghold or Graycastle’s capital, there are only a few big cities’ patrol forces who can cover the surrounding area, most of the time their investigation and

warning area depends on how far they can see when staying on the city wall. So, the area south of the pier should be outside of their patrol area, when we then locate our troops at this point, it is unlikely for them to raise the city guard's attention."

"How do you want to treat the sick?" Iron Axe asked.

"This task will largely depend on Lily's replica," Roland roughly explained to them the young woman's unusual ability. "Making it unnecessary to walk into the fugitive camp to heal these people. In other words, since any microorganism can become a replica you only have to collect the river water and let her purify it steadily. Afterward, you only have to give it to those who are sick to drink."

"Like... that?" He gawked at Roland, totally disbelieving.

"There are two points you have to take note of," the Prince raised two fingers, "First, you have to ensure that every person on board had drunken the purified water and second, you are absolutely prohibited from boiling the drinking water to clean it. In fact, the dirtier the water, the better it would be. It would contain more microorganism which means that the number of replicas in it will also be more. You might be unable to understand this, but as long as you do what I told you, everything will be okay."

"What about the patients in King's City, will we treat them the same way?"

"Almost, but the medicine cannot be delivered by our people, that would be too obvious. This task will fall under Theo's

responsibility,” Roland decided, “As long as they get their money, the street rats’ work efficiency will be very high.”

“Your Royal Highness, those street rats aren’t reliable, as long as it’s profitable, they may stab you in the back at any time.” Carter objected.

“Therefore the second part is only to prevent it as much as possible and isn’t necessary to be completed,” the Prince stood up, “The moment you sense something amiss, the First Army must immediately protect the witches and withdraw. As long as we are able to receive the refugees smoothly, it’s already our victory, regardless of how many people we were able to save in King’s City. Undermining the Church’s plan isn’t possible to achieve by just relying on purified water, as long as we can disprove their claim that ‘Only the Holy Elixir can repel the evil spirits’, their set game has already failed.”

“Finally, I will now declare the people who will travel to King’s City,” he shouted, “Iron Axe!”

“Yes!”

“You will lead 240 soldiers who will be responsible for protecting the witches and controlling the canal, for this eliminating every potential threat. Be sure to bring back the witches and the refugees.”

“I will do as you bid, Your Highness!” Iron Axe stood straight and saluted.

“Brian!”

“Yes!” The young Knights stick out his chest.

“You will lead sixty soldiers disguised as mercenaries, and you will be in charge of the medicine delivery, and make sure that the refugees will maintain order when boarding the ships.”

“As you command, Your Highness!”

“Next are the witches, this time leaving to King’s City by ship will be Nightingale, Echo, Lightning and Wendy.” Roland’s voice slowed down, “Your task will be somewhat unique so that I will explain it in a little while. Now it is only important to note that you always pay attention to your own security, ensuring your safe return.”

“Rest assured, Your Highness,” Nightingale patted her chest, “I will be with them.”

Roland nodded, “In that case, we come to the final point, which is also the most important aspect, after arriving in King’s City, the army can stay there for three days at most. After these three days, no matter how the actual situation is, you must return to Border Town.” He emphasized every word, “In case the Church plans to destroy the resistance of Graycastle, they certainly won’t spread the disease only to King’s City, most likely the Western Region will also be one of their goals. So you cannot stay in King’s City for longer than these three days, do you understand?”

“Yes, Your Highness!” Iron Axe and Brian answered in unison.

“Very well, then let us carry out this plan.”

“Hold on... Your Highness, what will I do?” Carter raised his hand.

“You will lead the rest of the First Army and guard my Border Town.” Roland patted his shoulder.

Chapter 222 - The Long Awaited Victory!

Fjord, Sea Dragon Bay.

The Church's follower had boarded the wall, shooting crossbow arrows towards the witches, but confronted with Shavi's invisible barrier and Molly's magical servant, their attempts at resistance showed little results. All their arrows would suddenly drop or be swallowed into the servant's belly. Only when the other side embedded their arrows with small pieces of God's Punishment Stones did they become a threat.

But in the end, the amount of God's Punishment Stones were limited, and every witch who was unfortunately enough and got hit would immediately be carried back to get treated. As long as the blood loss was stopped in time, their lives wouldn't be in danger. After two or three rounds of shooting, more than 20 witches already advanced to the edge of the wall. Ashes directly jumped on top of the wall, disposing of those believers who dared to show their heads.

After a few days of pre-war investigation, they knew the weaknesses of the wall like the back of their hand. From high up in the sky, a variety of pigeon cries could be heard. It was Maggie that was signaling that everyone had reached the correct position.

Having gone through several fights had bestowed Lotus with the experience to exhibit her ability without the slightest hesitation, the ground suddenly shook and began to rise. Seeing this, some of the Church's follower rushed forward to try and stop her, but in the end, they were all beheaded by Ashes one after another. It

didn't take long for the wall which wasn't embedded with God's Stone of Retaliation to begin to collapse. Followed by an attack of the witches who swarmed into the opened up space, and continuously made use of their ability to assault the believers. In a flash they had killed more than half of those who did not have a God's Stone of Retaliation protecting them. And those who still stood were smoothly and cleaned harvested by Ashes.

This was the first time since the church was built that they suffered a direct assault. Moreover, the opposite side was the Church's sworn enemy. The priest that was stationed there, also knew that the end of the day was coming so he called out to his followers to take the pills and sacrifice themselves for God. Ten of those believers who had turned mad rushed towards Ashes, and used their flesh to try and stop her, while the rest of them threw themselves at Lotus.

Seeing this, Lotus raised an already prepared earthen wall from the ground, temporarily blocking the enemy with it. With the God's Stone of Retaliation being unable to eliminate already completed magical results, they had to first go around the wall, but by that time the place behind the wall was already as empty.

Without any better option, the furious believer turned around, once more besieging Ashes. But at that moment the witches again appeared behind their back and in this way caught them off guard. After half an hour of fighting and suffering repeated losses, the ground was covered with the bodies of the Church's followers, ultimately leaving the Priest left standing.

While trembling he threw the pills into his mouth, but before he

even had the time to swallow, Ashes had come over, and cut off his arm.

“Damn you, you evil creature! You Devil cursed monster!” Holding his cut off end of his arm with his other hand full of fear, the Priest roared hysterically.

“Are you scared? Have you ever thought about their feelings when you tortured and killed those innocent?” Ashes stated coldly, “Compared with us witches, scum like you resemble a devil’s minion much more, you who does not shrink away from any crime. So, feel at ease when I send you back to hell to report.” Ending her speech, her sword fell, cutting his curse and his head off.

“Did we win?” Molly arrived at her side, her voice and face full of disbelief.

“Yes,” Ashes sighed in relief. “This was the last church in the Fjord, from here on, there is no longer any stronghold left on the islands, we won! ”

Although the Church’s power in the Fjord was feeble, with merely one hundred believers within every church and no stationed Army of Judges, this was still the first time that the witches had confronted the Church head-on and managed to win. From fleeing in all direction when they heard the grass rustled in the wind. Until now, where they managed to conquer the church, knocking down the huge monster of the past, even if it was only a negligible part of the Church, it was enough to excite all of the witches.

Just as she had expected, after everyone confirmed the long-awaited victory, they could not help but cheer loudly. In the hearts of all the witches, the Church was like an overbearing mountain, and now, when they had made the first step to climbing this mountain, permit them to see the first trace of the shining light of dawn. From now on, the Fjord had become their real homeland.

“We won!”

“Long live Her Majesty, Tilly!”

“Googoo!”

...

After traveling back to the island by boat, Ashes couldn't wait to return to Tilly's residence, and tell her the news that the witches had thoroughly won. But when she met up with her, the latter only stroked her silk like gray hair behind her ear, revealed a bright smile and said: “Maggie has already informed me, I heard that you all are safe and sound, this is really great.”

Indeed, compared to sailing, it is a lot faster to turn into a seabird and fly back. Ashes looked around and took in the surrounding, but she was unable to see the familiar figure, “Maggie?”

“She left immediately after reporting on your victory,” Tilly shook her head helplessly.

Hearing this Ashes couldn't help but feel shocked, "She... already returned to the Western Border?"

"Well," Tilly said with a chuckle, "Maybe, she found a very good friend over there. After just a few days, she already couldn't wait any longer and asked if she could return. If it weren't for the fact that we needed her help to beat the Church, I'm afraid that after delivering the letter, she would have turned around and flown straight back on that same day... I'm getting more and more curious about the other side."

For a while, Ashes hesitated, but then she asked: "Should I not have left her there?"

"No, that was excellent," the 5th Princess responded with a firm voice, "It is only because you left Maggie in Border Town, that we could easily get in touch with the other side. Furthermore, I also let her take my reply along and pass it on to Roland Wimbledon," She made a grimace, "Care to guess, what I replied to him?"

"You refused him of course. Crossing the sea to reach this island was already full of risk, how could we then send any witches to the Western Region."

"No, I agreed to his request," Tilly smiled, "Furthermore, I also briefed him about the abilities of the non-combat witches and said in the letter that as long as he can guarantee the safety of the witches, I will consider sending some witches to Border Town. What was it that he said? Oh, that's right. Deepening our

friendship by learning and observing together, both of us progressing hand in hand.” She paused, “If it becomes necessary, I can even go over to Border Town myself.”

“Your Royal Highness!” Ashes could not stop herself from shouting out her former honorific title in shock.

“I know what you are worried about, but right now the biggest enemy of us witches is the Church. What this means is, only by having more allies can we have more power. That we have dealings with the various Islands of the Fjord is because of the beneficial relations it brings, while the Witch Cooperation Association in Border Town can be seen as a natural friend to us. So why don’t you show them some goodwill?” Tilly laughed, “Moreover, according to Maggie, it is possible to evolve your ability again by learning knowledge about it. If the witches we send there learn this technique, Sleeping Island would also benefit from it.”

“But for you to go in person, in case the other party...”

Tilly reached out with her hand to cut her off, “Rest assured, I did not mean that I will leave immediately. As long as the situation isn’t clear, I won’t take the risk and go there. And also do not forget that Sylvie can see through all kinds of camouflage, no matter if it is fine make-up or a magical illusion, nothing can escape her eyes. As long as she belongs to the first batch of people we send over to Border Town, she will be able to help me find out the truth behind the 4th Prince. Besides, even if there was any kind of danger, won’t you still be at my side?”

Ashes looked for a long time into her eyes, until she finally

noded.

“Of course, we can wait until Maggie returns next month, before we speak about this any further.” Tilly laughed. “Right now we have more important things we need to do.”

“What?” Ashes asked somewhat surprised. Now, after all the strongholds of the Church in the Fjords had been destroyed, it seemed that the rest of their objectives would just be to peacefully continue to develop Sleeping Island... but when she looked at the expression of the other, it didn't look like that was the case.

The 5th Princess pointed to the white silk gloves with the red gem on it, “There aren't only ruins to be found in the kingdoms of the mainland, there are also ancient ruins on the Fjord's Shadow Islands. Most likely the sea folk's magic stones are coming from there. Taking advantage of the destruction of the Church, I want to go and take a look for myself. ”

“Is this about the legend of the Ghost Shadow Red River?” After having to do with the Fjords for some time, Ashes had also heard of this legend, “The remains were hidden in the sea, appearing and disappearing from time to time. Moreover, within the surroundings are many dangerous undercurrents and sea monsters, which makes it impossible for ordinary people to reach it. Since they were discovered for the first time, many explorer, in order to look at this inconceivable marvel, were hit by misfortune and were now buried at the Shadow Islands. You also do not know the certain position of the ruins, so how do you want to enter them?”

“Maybe I do not know where it is, but I know someone who can take us there. In fact, this great explorer is currently on Sleeping Island, and it was also he who first discovered these ruins,” Tilly smiled.

Chapter 223 - Premeditation

During these days, Theo stayed in an inn of King's City, anxiously waiting for the reply from Border Town.

A towering inner wall divided King's City into two separate worlds, and the people would be strictly controlled when entering or leaving. No matter if they were aristocrats or wealthy merchants, everyone could only enter after going through a thorough inspection inside of a small room. Once they had any sign of disease, such as fever, flushes, or dark spots, they were not allowed inside. In case they left the inner city, they would have to return in the evening hours at the latest. Otherwise, when the sun went down, the gates would be closed and they would have to spend the night outside.

But this still couldn't stop the spread of demonic plague, yesterday he had heard the rumors that there were also nobles living in the inner city who had become infected. In case the Church had not finally released their first batch of Holy Elixir, Theo believed that the nobles would have soon started to evacuate from King's City.

Six days after sending out the letter, he was finally informed by Margaret's Chamber of Commerce that news had arrived. He hastily rushed to the agreed location a tailor shop, where on arrival he was led into the basement by the clerk, and there he met the the Chamber of Commerce's owner who had been waiting for a long time now.

On entering he saw Margaret sitting at a low table, a pot of ice

water was placed in front of her, which continuously emitted bursts of cold air. Theo who was sweating from rushing over, sat himself cross-legged on the opposite side, only to suddenly feel a surge of cold breeze on his face, which immediately lifted his spirits.

“His Highness asked me to give you this letter,” with this words Margaret handed him a sheepskin envelope, taking a closer look the envelope’s sealing wax seemed to still be intact.

Theo was impatient to open the message, the letter he had taken out gave him a brief account of the operation plan, the news that the Army had set out, as well as the tasks he himself had to complete. After carefully reading through it again, he put the letter into his pocket, looked towards Margaret and asked, “Was there anything else His Highness requested you to do?”

“No, he just asked me to send a messenger informing you about the letter’s arrival. Of course, since it was an express delivery there are some extra charges, I was free so I already wrote it into the account.”

“Keke, all right.” Theo cleared his throat. “His Royal Highness wants all the refugees to be transported to Border Town in the shortest amount of time, so he wants you to supply a lot of ships for an uninterrupted transportation, not only those two fleets.”

“Even if they are already infected?” Margaret asked with great interest, “I do not think he wanted to turn the whole Western Territory into a death zone, so... has His Highness found a way to cure the demonic plague?”

“He did indeed,” he nodded, “In fact, there were already infected people present on the first transport, at the time we send them out the disease had merely not broken out yet, only when they came close to Border Town, was it discovered. They are already on their way back to King’s City, with all crew members on board, safe and sound.”

“His Royal Highness is indeed an incredible man, even the Church wasn’t able to come up with an antidote so quickly,” Margaret exclaimed, “Then, how many days does he intend to use for the boarding of the refugees? A week?”

Theo stretched out three fingers.

“This... impossible!” For a moment, the business woman was stunned, only to repeatedly shake her head soon after, “Even if half of those people died, there will be still be more than 5,000 people. Being able to transport them within three days means that I will need to prepare nearly a hundred ships. Even if the Chamber of Commerce stops all its other shipping transportation, I would just about to meet this number. However, this way the losses I would suffer will be in the thousands of gold royals or more. And the loss I would make by losing because that is uncountable, even if the steam engine was to become free of charge it still wouldn’t be enough. So... I am afraid I have to refuse. ”

“If all the people were sitting on the deck, rather than lying in beds in the cabins, the number of individuals a ship could carry would be doubled,” Theo insisted, “Furthermore, as long as we don’t pay attention to their comfort, the two masters which are

used for the transportation of ore can also be used to move the people. As long as the top of the hatch is opened, one ship can then load about 200 people at the same time. This kind of vessels, your old friend Hogg should have a lot of it, right?”

“He should definitely have several ships of this type, in Silver City...” Margaret still looked a little hesitant, “Moreover, according to your arithmetic, it should probably be possible to reduce the number of ships needed to 50. But... this really isn’t a good deal.”

Theo also had the same thoughts, allowing dozens of ships to converge on top of the canal, just the scheduling and coordinating would require an enormous amount of energy. Also, all the charter costs would be paid out of their own pocket. After expending such a large amount of effort and taking all that trouble, the ‘harvest’ wouldn’t account for all the work that was needed. This really couldn’t be regarded as a good deal. At this point, he could only put forth the final resort.

At the end of the letter His Highness wrote a short line: If Margaret doesn’t want to help, tell her that Lightning is also coming.

Reading the sentence had made him a little puzzled, is there any particular relationship between the businesswoman and the cute, little blonde girl? Looking at their appearances it doesn’t seem like that ah... but His Royal Highness must have his own reasons when he speaks so certainly of it. Coming to this conclusion, Theo slowly opened his mouth, “There is a reason why there is no alternative than concluding the transportation within three days. What His

Highness is doing is the equivalent of going into a tiger's den to seize its food. If this is dragged out for too long, the Church might be coming to their door and Lightning is also within their ranks, if they discover the existence of a witch, it might become dangerous for her."

"What did you just say?" Her voice suddenly rose up. "Lightning is coming?"

"His Highness' letter did indeed say so," Theo put on his most honest face, "Probably, in order to guide the troops and offer an early warning. After all, we are currently within the domain of the New King."

"I got it," Margaret stood up, "When do you need a vessel?"

"They ought to arrive in four days in case they aren't delayed on the way."

"I will go to my greatest extent to arrange it," she went to her desk to the side, took up her pen and began to write, "But I have a condition, you have to tell me the position of His Highness troops. So that in the case that they want to enter the city, I can arrange adequate rooms for them."

Alright, it seems that this trick is indeed useful, "I think this point shouldn't be a problem," Theo was secretly delighted, "In addition, I have one more thing I will need your help with."

“Speak,” Margaret sighed.

“I need a procession of carts with wine barrels, the more barrels there are, the better. But they mustn’t be filled with ale or wine, but with river or well water.” According to His Highness’ letter, the crucial person to solve the demonic plague is the witch Lily; she can transform ordinary water into a cure for the disease. But there is a dangerous flaw in His Highness plan, if the street rats were allowed to come near the camp and get to know that there were people who could continuously produce the “Holy Elixir,” I bet that on the next day everyone in the city would come to know about it.

“River and well water?” Margaret raised her eyebrows. “Are you sure?”

“Rest assured, His Royal Highness will pay for this.” Theo declared laughingly.

In considerations of confidentiality and security, transporting the water from the troops’ camp to King’s City could only be done by him personally. In case he would just carry a water bag to cure the fugitives from the Eastern Region of the demonic plague, it would not only be troublesome, but its efficiency would also be very low. Because of this he had to come up with a method which allowed him to bring as much of the purified water through as possible in one round.

Installing a large barrel on a cart was clearly a good choice.

Chapter 224 - Launching The Rescue Plan

After learning that His Highness' side had a method to cure the demonic plague, Theo's irritable mood finally calmed down.

Once there was something he could busy himself with, the following days seemed to go by a lot faster.

In addition to his visits to the wine estates at the outskirts of King's City, he also planned the route for the convoy, while keeping the topography of the area around the canal's pier and the city gate in mind.

Nowadays, wanting to enter the city had become quite a hassle, using the refugees outside of King's City as the reason, all the major city gates had been sealed. In this way prohibiting any outsider from entering the city, especially after the Church had begun to distribute the Holy Elixir. After the refugees became aware of this, they began to desperately attack the city gates every day. Hoping to be allowed to go to the church for treatment. However, the guards stationed at the wall responded without hesitation and flocked them with crossbow bolts. The result was, that by now many corpses were lying in front of the city gates and rotting under the scorching sun, spreading an unpleasant odor.

The only open gate was a side gate limited to the use of the nobility and the merchants who brought the food. Fortunately, Theo had worked in the patrol for some time and because of that he was known by most of the guards as a native of King's City, allowing him to go through the gate with just a simple greeting.

It was precisely because of this quarantine, that both the inner and outer city lost almost all contact, so even when they had transported the refugees away with great fanfare, the news of it had difficulties spread into the inner city. Not to mention that the upper nobility were anxiously waiting for someone to ship all the refugees from the Eastern Region away. And save them from later having to suppress a rebellion.

Theo roughly understood why His Highness had set out on the same day he had received the letter. All these people outside of the city felt as if they had been abandoned by their King. So, in case the Church sent out some priest to heal them, they would become their most faithful of believers.

But if His Highness could arrive before the Church could grab them, these people would instead be pulled to his side. There was no doubt that after healing them and offering them a new place to stay, they would become His Highness most fanatical of supporters.

On the morning of the fourth day, the returning first fleet arrived at the canal's pier on time. Theo was surprised to discover that His Highness had sent as many as 300 soldiers of the First Army. Who were furthermore all dressed in their standard uniform and armed with revolver rifles. With this powerful contingent as a safeguard, even if the Church came to know about them, he estimated that they would still be unable to prevent the refugees from leaving.

“Lightning!” Margaret who also waited at the pier immediately shouted when she saw the little girl's figure, unable to containing

herself from going forward and hugging her.

“This is...?” Iron Axe asked.

“The owner of the Grand Chamber of Commerce, Ms. Margaret,” Theo explained, “All the ships we need for the transportation will be provided by her or a partner of her’s, without her we would never be able to implement His Highness plan.”

“So, it was like this,” After understanding the situation Iron Axe nodded to her. “Thank you for your help.”

“I’ll deduct all my expense from His Highness fee,” Margaret merely shrugged. “But when you’re thanking me, you should also thank Lightning.”

Lightning crooked head and asked confused, “Why me?”

“Keke, it’s nothing.” Theo coughed twice. “What are you going to do next?”

“Next we will set up a camp in the south of the dock to control the area, and then in the afternoon we will start the rescue mission.” Iron Axe said, “If the ships could be here by then, that would be for the best.”

*

When Brian led his men into the refugee area, he could not help but frown.

Everywhere he looked he saw dying people. Their skin had split open at many places, with black blood continuously flowing out of them and attracting swarms of flies. However, those ill people didn't even have the strength left to drive the insects off, simply letting these flying insects crawl all over their body and drink of their blood.

Seeing all this, he couldn't help but think of the Months of Demons, when the people of Border Town were trapped in the slums of Longsong Stronghold. Having to face death by hunger and coldness, but being utterly helpless against it. If all this was really done by the Church, it was a simply unforgivable crime.

“Let's call the first group,” Brian said. “We depend on you, Miss Echo.”

If they rashly went within the crowd and announced that they were in possession of medicine to cure the ill, it would most likely cause a ruckus. And when a large group of refugees went into the direction of the docks all at once, their small group of dozens of people would simply not be enough to suppress them. Because of this, they had to make sure that the information was always only spread to a select small groups at the same time. Considering this problem, His Highness had decided to specially sent Miss Echo along. With her ability, Echo was able to control the area within which her voice would be heard, or she could also just put her voice next to a person's ear.

Even though Brian saw how she opened her mouth to speak, he was unable to hear any sound, while the fugitives turned around and looked over.

Soon, a group of them came over, more stumbling than running, “Your honor, is what you said really true? As long as you can cure the disease, I am willing to follow you to the Western Region!”

“Of course it’s true. Our ships have stopped at the pier, so gather your family and come with me!”

Other soldiers also stepped forward to help the patients who laid on the ground and were unable to move. Their small group instantly expanded to several hundred people, who walked together in the direction of the pier. Many people who noticed this scene, also began to follow, doing their best to catch up with them.

Back to the pier, soldiers of the First Army had already filled with bags with purified water and placed them on a long table. At the gangway to board the ship stood Iron Axe with a squadron, only letting only two people through at the same time, and ensuring that all the people who wanted to embark had first drunk the curing water.

“Everybody listens, these water bags are filled with medicine that treats the illness, so as long as you drink from it, you will immediately recover.” Next, to the long table, they had set up a stage on which stood the one with the highest standing amongst the soldiers, constantly preaching His Highness’ manuscript, “What the church has called the ‘Demonic Plague caused by witches and could only be dispelled by their Holy Elixir’ is a

groundless statement, nothing more. They just want to earn more money and also make you kneel to them, thanking them for their graciousness in saving your life. Instead Lord Roland not only brought the medicine, he also doesn't charge you any fees for it! Yes, you don't even have to pay a copper royal for it!"

These words immediately heated up the crowd, but when the first person drunk the purified water, he quickly felt how his body changed. Unable to believe it, he tore open his clothes only to see how the dark spots quickly faded away, "This medicine is indeed effective! I'm healed, I'm healed!"

"Me too, God above, the wounds no longer bleed!"

"God you say, where is it? I only see a group of liars!"

"That's right! This medicine has nothing to do with the Church!"

"Long live His Highness, Roland!"

As more and more people were healed, the witnessing crowd also became more and more excited. If the First Army to hadn't been there to control the order, the water bags placed on the table would have immediately been washed away by the flood of fugitives.

"At the moment, His Highness is busy with developing the Western Region, for this, he requires a lot of manpower to cultivate fields, build houses, build roads... he does not charge you

anything for the medicine, and he also doesn't force you to go with us to the West." The soldier responsible for the propaganda continued to shout as loud as possible, "But His Royal Highness promises, that as long as you are willing to follow us to the Western Region and work for him, you will get food, shelter and payment! No matter what your specialty is, you will get a matching job! If you are willing to take the first step into a new life, just step forward and follow the mercenaries on board, they will take you to your new home! If you are unwilling that is also okay, we will still be here and provide help for the next three days; after that we will leave. During these three days, food will be given out free of charge by the caravan!"

"Is there really a new home and work with salary waiting for us?" Someone asked loudly.

"Of course, that is the condition offered by His Highness!" The soldier nodded in response.

"Please let me on board; I am willing to serve His Royal Highness!"

"Me too!"

"And I!"

"I'm a blacksmith!"

"..."

Brian was very pleased to see that within this group of hundreds of people, no one chose to stay in King's City and instead they all decided to board the ship to the West. The moment a vessel was full, it would immediately depart and then be replaced by an empty ship. Under Margaret's command, there wasn't even the slightest pause between.

Afterward, Brian continued to lead refugees from the camps to the dock, always relying on Echo sound transmission technique to draw in a new batch of Eastern Region refugees. The number of refugees under her control would be between 300 to 400 every time. As he returned with a new team of patients to the pier, he suddenly saw how the First Army stationed in the wheat fields in the south began to move. A team of them rushed out at flying speed into the direction of the northern bank of the canal, while carrying their guns in their hand.

"What happened?" Brian asked into the direction of Iron Axe's men.

"Scout Miss Lightning said that someone had secretly jumped off the ship and run away," one of them offered while saluting. "Maybe there's a rat which had hidden itself between the refugees?"

Chapter 225 - The Avengers

In fact, there was more than one of those rats, so once again, Iron Axe stood in front of a man they had captured and looked at him expressionlessly, “You are the third person who’s tried to escape by jumping off the ship, the refugees also told us that you haven’t come from the Eastern Region. So, what will be your important last words, will it be a confession?”

The two people who had previously been caught, after using a dagger to cut off a finger, of both of them immediately confessed their origins and purpose in coming. Of course, their corpses were still thrown into the canal afterwards, since Iron Axe had never been a person who had a soft-heart. His experience of struggling for survival in Iron Sand City was that when dealing with an enemy that was hiding the head and showing the tail, the best response was to cut off one exposed limb after the other. However, what surprised him was that the prisoner with his after being pushed down on his knees and getting his hands tied to his back, still looked very healthy, nothing like those other sick people.

Is it possible that some other faction has sent him here to die?

“I’m not your enemy,” were his first words when he opened his mouth, and directly stared into Iron Axe’s eyes. “My name is Hill Fawkes, Theo should know my name!”

...

At this time Theo still hadn’t left the dock. After being called, he

came over to Iron Axe, looked at Hill Fawkes, and said: “This man is one of the people who belong to Black Hammer.”

“So, he isn’t your man?” Iron Axe confirmed.

“He has nothing to do with me; he is a street rat who only recently joined.”

“You deceived Black Hammer and also the Skeleton Fingers,” Hill suddenly opened his mouth and shouted, “You are not working for Timothy, but rather the Lord of the Western Territory, His Highness Roland Wimbleton!”

“He knows too much,” Theo said as he made a slicing gesture across his neck to Iron Axe. “The best place for this man is the canal.”

Hill, to stop his death, proclaimed: “I have heard everything the mercenary announced, I believe we can cooperate! I am willing to work for His Royal Highness Roland!”

“His Highness does not need the allegiance of a street rat,” Iron Axe said as he pulled out his sword.

“I am not a street rat, I am... I’m a citizen of King’s City! I’m Timothy’s enemy!” Hill cried.

“Wait,” Theo called Iron Axe to stop and went over to Hill. The latter raised his head and looked fearlessly into the guard’s eyes,

with eyes which seemed to burn.

So... This was what I saw in his eyes at the first time, but wasn't able to understand at the time, Theo thought. His eyes were full of hatred, and the hatred was so intense that even as he was deliberately trying to conceal it, he could not completely cover his burning anger.

“Tell me what it is you want to do for His Highness.”

“It is true that I lived in the northern district of the city and that I occasionally went to the Covert Trumpeter to get a drink, but I didn't lose all my possession because of gambling. Furthermore, my wife also didn't run away with someone else...” Hill gnashed his teeth, “The truth is, it was Timothy who caused her death!”

The story really wasn't that complicated, which allowed Theo to quickly come to understand the sequence of the events.

He and his wife originally were members of the “Dove and Cylinder” an acrobatic troupe, who often performed in King's City's inner city. The acrobatic troupe wasn't that big; they only had seven members, and the atmosphere between them has always been very harmonious. His wife was the only woman in the group, and had also been unanimously pursued by everyone. But in the end, Hill became the victor, finally winning her heart. Afterward, their married life was very sweet, and not much later the both of them had saved enough to buy a house in the inner city. But all this was destroyed by Timothy's witch-hunting operation. Under Langley's leadership, the patrol acted like a bunch of mad dogs, recklessly capturing those under suspicion, and his wife just happened to be

one of those who had been unfortunate enough to be captured.

Hill Fawkes had thought that as long as he paid the ransom money, he could get his wife released, or if that proved impossible at least see her face to face. However, even though the prison warden accepted the ransom, not only did he not release her, he even refused his request to let him enter the jail and see her. He only tried appeasing him by saying that he only had to wait a while until they confirmed that his wife wasn't a witch, and she would naturally be set free afterwards. So when the warden informed him that he should come to the jail to get his wife, he never expected that the situation would take a sharp turn for the worse, leaving him to find the scarred corpse of his wife.

When Hill angrily went to Langley to demand an explanation, the final result was, the prison head and his guards had merely been sentenced to ten lashes, and received a fine of twenty-five silver royals, while he was given three gold royals in compensation. This kind of sentencing was totally unacceptable for Hill; he even went so far as finding the highest person in charge, Sir Weimar also known as "Knight Steelheart", but even this was to no avail. Sir Weimar could only tell him that Langley was Timothy's cronies and that the new members of the patrol were also all his lackeys. Furthermore, the witch hunt was His Majesty personal order, so even Sir Pail, the Minister of Justice could not speak out against it.

Thereupon Hill decided he would make the New King pay, never anticipating that his former partners in the acrobatic troupe would actually support him. However, as a group of acrobats without any form of combat expertise, wealth, or troops under their command, it was almost impossible for them to carry out their vendetta against the King. The only possible way to harm him that Hill

could think of was collecting intelligence about Timothy and giving it to his enemies, like the Queen of Clearwater Garcia Wimbledon. For this, they had all joined different groups of street rats, and decided to collect any clues they could find concerning the new King.

This was also the reason why he secretly monitored all of Theo's movements. In case that Timothy wanted to get rid of the refugees, he had to try to stop them as much as possible. But he was too slow before he could take action, the demonic plague had broken out, and Theo suspended the transportation of the refugees. But today, Hill discovered that they had started the operation once again. And in order to investigate, he straightforwardly disguises himself as a refugee and succeeded in mixing in with the crowd. Resulting in the discovery that in truth Theo was actually serving Roland Wimbledon, the 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle.

Who, without a doubt, as a qualified competitor of the Throne of Graycastle, was also an enemy of Timothy.

Probably in the eyes of Hill, as long as it allows him to kill the new King, he wouldn't even shrink away from working for the Devil.

"Okay, the last question. By mixing into the crowd to make discreet inquiries for news, did it never occur to you that you might infect yourself?" Theo asked with interest, "I never thought that a person with vengeance as his aim would throw his life away that easily."

"I have the antidote," Hill confessed. "It is hidden in a pocket in

my undergarments. All my troupe's partners spend most of their family's possessions to buy it for me from the black market."

Theo reached out and searched with his hand, fishing out a finger thick transparent vial, which was filled with a blue liquid. He handed it over to Iron Axe, then said, "That should be the Holy Elixir of the Church. I think His Royal Highness will be interested in something like this."

"This person..." Iron Axe received the vial then asked, "What do you plan with him?"

"Well," Theo touched his chin, if it were the normal times, without the possibility of verifying the authenticity of his words, we could only choose the safest method and directly sent him on his way. However, at this time, there was someone in the camp who could judge whether he was speaking the truth or was lying, "I want to ask Miss Nightingale to verify his words."

...

Later in the evening, Theo returned to the Covert Trumpeter.

Black Hammer's spirit evidently wasn't very high, with the spread of the recent epidemic, his business had dropped so low it was at freezing point. And if that wasn't bad enough already, Silver Ring and Pots had also become infected, which intensified his restlessness by many times.

Hill, as if nothing unusual had happened, sat slightly stiff on the opposite side of Theo.

Theo put on a slight smile then threw out a pouch of gold royals in front of Black Hammer. “There really is no reason for you to be so depressed. I have some good news and I also have a business offer for you.”

After counting the coins and putting them away, Black Hammer opened his mouth and said weakly, “Currently we won’t take any business. Now that the demonic plague is running amok, who would be foolish enough to go outside? All this money isn’t even sufficient to buy the Holy Elixir. Don’t you know how much you have to pay to buy even one bottle of medicine from the black market? At least twenty-five gold royals!”

“What a coincidence,” Theo laughed. “As it happens, the business I am speaking of has also to do with buying medicine,” he paused, “...a special medicine to cope with the demonic plague.”

Chapter 226 - Inner City Operation

“You managed to get hold of the Holy Elixir?” Black Hammer was suddenly back in full spirit.

“Holy Elixir?” Theo retracted his smile and sneered instead, “There is no need to take the Church’s drug, there are others medicines that can also cure patients of the demonic plague.” Saying this he removed two small bags from his waist and placed them on the table, “Putting the blame on the witches is just the usually trick used to get some benefits, after all, a dead person cannot talk back.”

Puzzled Black Hammer picked up one of the bags, and placed it near his ear and shook it, only then did he untie the rope and smell what was inside, “No odour?”

“Just take them to Silver Ring and Pots, afterward you will know that this is the real medicine,” Theo said. “They should be somewhere in the tavern.”

“Since we discovered their infection, I made them hide in the basement, and I didn’t allow them to come out. Nowadays whenever people see someone with black spots, it’s quite likely that they will go out of their way to attack the sick, and because of this, the den of the skeleton fingers won’t open its door to let them in.” Black Hammer picked up the second bag and announced, “Sir, I’ll go now and give it a try.”

When he got up and left, Hill was still staring at the table, not

saying a word, which made Theo secretly shake his head.

An ordinary person who lives under the constant threat of the demonic plague can never keep so calm when he hears that he can get the medicine to cure the disease. Even if you do not want to seem too excited, at least take a look at it and ask a few words. With his performance, Hill has proven that he doesn't hold the qualification to become a spy.

“Can this medicine really cure the demonic plague?” Little Finger shouted suddenly. “Sir, where did you get this from?”

Even the little girl is better at it than him, Theo thought while taking a sip of his wine, “Without a doubt, after all, it was given to me by my Lord in the Royal Palace, other than him, who else would dare to go against the Church?”

In no time, Black Hammer came back and brought Silver Ring and Pots along, “Oh, my God, this medicine is incredible! Just moments after they drank it, the black spot on their bodies had already began to disappear.”

Seeing Theo, both men immediately went to their knees even though their wounds were still bleeding, and in unison they said, “Sir, Thanks a lot for your medicine, you've saved our lives!”

“First go and bandage your wounds,” Theo waved at their injuries. Although the purified water was able to heal the disease, it still could not heal their wounds. Such serious injuries would have to recover like any other injury, and needed at least a week,

“Rather than thanking me, you should thank my employer. If you can fulfill this current mission, it is even possible that you can get rid of your identity as street rats.”

“Maj... No, I mean, does your employer really want us to sell this medicine?” Black Hammer asked excitedly. Apparently, he had already realized how much revenue they could make by selling these potions.

“That’s right; the Church is currently using the medicine to deceive the people, which has made my employer furious with them. If he allows this group of so called fortune tellers who lack any scruple keep going, I’m afraid the whole King’s City will have changed into a cathedral soon, rather than Wimbledon’s home territory.” Theo lowered his voice, “Also, he is unwilling to see such a huge city only be left with only a few citizens, therefore, this medicine absolutely cannot be sold at a price so expensive that it would lead to it becoming unaffordable for most people.” He took another two leather bags from his waist and threw them on the table, “These kind of bags, will be sold for at most for ten silver royals.”

“T-ten silver royals?” Black Hammer exclaimed, his eyes shot wide open.

“Yes, six belong to my employer, the rest will belong to you,” he extended his palm, “And this medicine should be enough to use 5000-6000 people. Therefore you can obtain at least several hundred royals, even after splitting it up, it is still not a small amount. It should be sufficient for you to spend it for the rest of your life in comfort.

The other side seemed as if they wanted to speak but were unable to find the words. The whole time they stared at the water backs on the table, seemingly thinking about how to obtain even greater benefits.

Within his heart, Theo clearly knew what was going through these street rats' minds.

The potion itself had no processing cost, even if they gave it away for free, it wouldn't have been a problem. However, without a profit to be shared, he could only rely on himself, which would substantially lower the efficiency and would also be much more eye-catching. So, by letting the rats sell the medicine, he could reduce the risk, and ten silver royals was also a price that the majority of the urban citizens would be able to pay. Of course, to be honest, he couldn't trust that they would sell it so cheaply, whether they stole a part of it to sell in the inner city, or transferred it to the black market, they would always make huge profits.

Ultimately, the amount of potion sold to the citizen for a low price would perhaps be less than half of it, but this wasn't the focus of Theo's concern. His task was to undermine the conspiracy of the Church as much as possible so that everyone could understand that the Holy Elixir was not the only antidote able to dispel the evil spirits nor was it such a rare or expensive thing. The result would be that the propaganda of the Church would become publicly questioned, especially by those believers who had gone to great extents to buy such costly medicine, beginning to question themselves about whether god's spokesperson had cheated them or not.

“I know exactly what you’re thinking,” Theo opened his mouth and began to speak, “You want to hide some of the medicine and secretly sell it for a higher prices by selling it to the upper ranks, I can act as if I haven’t seen it... but I won’t forget,” his tone became cold, “My employer really isn’t a good-natured person, if you do not want to drown into the moat, it would be the best to show a bit of restraint, after all, only alive can you feel the pleasures of living.”

“But what should we do if someone else resells the medicine?” Silver Ring asked.

“That’s very easy to be solved; everyone can only buy only one bag and they have to drink it on the spot.” After he finished giving his advice, he looked at Black Hammer and asked, “How is it, are you interested in this business?”

“But the Covert Trumpeter may not be able to handle so much medicine, I think ...”

Theo interrupted him immediately. “It’s your business to arrange for the people who will sell the medicine and it is also your decision where you will sell it. I’m just the substitute my employer has sent to keep an eye on you.”

Black Hammer gnashed his teeth, look at his four subordinates, and when he saw that none of them were raising any objection, he smashed his fist on the table and proclaimed, “This business, I will take it!”

“Well,” Theo nodded, “On sunset, the day after tomorrow, a carriage carrying the medicine will come to the pub’s entryway, so you have time until then to arrange your workforce and also spread the news about the drug release. Do a good job of it; my employer doesn’t want to see any failure.”

The day after tomorrow is the last day of the First Army’s stay. After they leave the city, no matter what the city turns into, it won’t cause a threat for His Royal Highness, Theo thought.

...

After leaving the tavern, it didn’t take long until Hill had caught up to him.

“Won’t you meet up with my companions? They are all eager to take revenge against Timothy.”

“For the time being I’m trusting you because you passed the test,” Theo shook his head and continued. “If you had not been caught today, what would have been your next steps?”

“I would have gone back and told everyone the news, and listened to their opinions about it. I’m not sure if I should continue to keep watch for a while or if I should immediately go to His Highness Roland,” Fawkes replied.

“Oh?” Theo’s interest was piqued, so he asked, “What’s your

opinion about it?”

For a moment Hill hesitated, then stated what was on his mind, “I do not think that His Royal Highness is the same as most of the other nobles. Very few of them wouldn’t spare any effort to save the fugitives, and... he also treats the witches equally favorable as everyone else. Supposing the case that Timothy would be the same, it would be unlikely that my wife would’ve...” He became silent for a while, “So I would prefer to serve His Highness directly.”

“If that is the case you should go back and say nothing, act as if you have never been to the pier.”

“Why...” Hill lifted his head in astonishment.

“An outstanding spy should make a habit of concealing their secrets inside of their heart, rather than sharing everything with others, especially at such a critical moment as this.” Theo stated one reason after another, “If you want to work for His Highness, there are still many things you will need to learn.”

Chapter 227 - The Whistleblower

In the grand hall of the church, the presiding priest was overlooking the farmer kneeling before his feet.

The farmers originally tall and sturdy stature had now turned into a completely crooked lump, with his hands slightly trembling and his skin showing an abnormal purple color. Not much longer and those patches will condense into dark spots, and eventually spread all over his body. By only getting infected today he can be considered as strong enough.

“I remember you; you are Rocky Hill living in the Eastern District, you frequently come to the church to bring us fresh wheat grain,” the priest said.

“You... recognize me! That’s great, Your Reverence” he kowtowed again and again, “The demonic plague infected my family, I, I need the Holy Elixir, I beseech you.”

“However, what is it that you brought with you to the Church today? The Holy Elixir isn’t something that I can arbitrarily give away,” Ferry stated, not stalling or taking his time. “The exchange it requires has to be given by your heart.”

“I, I in order to buy medicine, I have been cheated by those rats and lost all my money,” Rock Hill said with a trembling voice, “Please forgive me, for my heart wasn’t sincere, I should have never sought shortcuts by going through the black market. At present I only have one last egg left, please accept it.” With this

words, he took one plump egg out of his chest and offered it with his hands extended above his head.

“Pinning your hope on the deceiving and mean people of the black market will naturally be punished, but God will always extend his hand to help a lost lamb back on the right track. Only those who recognize their own faults will be able to go further and further on their pilgrimage.” Ferry took the egg and smiled.” Get up; God forgives you. ”

“Re-really?” Rocky Hill didn’t dare believe his ears.

“God’s envoys will never deceive someone.” Ferry beckon waved, and another follower holding a box with potions immediately came over. Ferry picked four bottles and handed them to Rocky Mountain. “If I remember correctly, your family has a total of four people, right?”

“Yes, Your Reverence,” he swallowed his tears, took the Holy Elixir in his hands and then leaned over to kiss the priest’s shoes, “Thank you, thank you, from now on I will dedicate my whole life to the Church and to God!”

This scene also touched all the believers standing at the side, they immediately began to cheering, happily welcoming a new member to their family of believers.

Waiting until the cheers ebbed down a little, Ferry held his hand up indicating that they should become quiet, then said with a clear voice: “Next.”

...

This kind of Holy Elixir distribution continued until dusk.

With the sounding of the King's City's bell, Priest Ferry declared the end of the day's distribution ceremony which would be continued tomorrow morning, leaving the begging crowd behind in the main hall.

Although his body had become somewhat tired, his spirit was still fully burning. Since standing in the grand hall listening to the pleas and prayers of the people, and watching as they couldn't wait to do everything they could to please him, made it impossible to not feel like a God in his mind.

No, what is commonly known as God is really just the Church itself, Ferry thought. After developing the demonic disease and the corresponding antidote, we can easily decide about other people's life and death, with this kind of power in our hands, what is the difference between us and God? Sighing with emotion, he was once more assured that giving up the inheritance of his family business and joining the Church had been the right choice.

In the face of such power, no one will be able to stop us. Wealthy businessmen? High-ranking nobles? When facing death, they will all be equally willing to abandon everything in exchange for the opportunity to live.

Returning to the rest area in the back hall, a clergyman hurriedly

came up to him and whispered in his ear: “Your Reverence, a street rat came in and reported that he had discovered an important matter.”

“Regarding what?”

“Something about the refugees of the Eastern Region, the concrete news he only wants to say when meeting you face to face.” The clergyman immediately answered.

According to the Church’s instructions given beforehand, Ferry should make full use of the demonic plague and its antidote, and gather as many new followers for Hermes as possible. Therefore, winning over the refugees was also a part of his plan, but compared to the citizens of King’s City their importance wasn’t as high. He had intended to wait another two or three days, and let half of the homeless refugees die before coming out to treat and cure the rest, which would make them feel as if their King had abandoned them. As a result, within the whole of King’s City, 90% of its population would become the Church’s followers. With this kind of merit and the previous order for the Battle for the Throne, would perhaps be sufficient to take another step down the road to the rank of Bishop.

At least in regards to rewarding the people for their merits, the Church has always been very fair, never considering someone’s blood relationship or former identity. As long as someone showed outstanding performance, they would be promoted.

What kind of severe problem could have arisen within the refugees?

Suppressing his doubts to the bottom of his heart, he quietly said, “Alright, just take him to the secret room, I will join him soon.”

“Yes, Your Reverence.”

Taking off the ceremony priest robe, Ferry grasped a flexible plate armor out of the closet and put it on, and then covered it over with a loose coat. Afterward, he stepped in front of a silver mirror for a little reorganization before he left for the secret room.

Stepping into the chamber and analyzing the situation, the priest saw that the “informant’s” hair was disorderly, and his complexion was sallow and skinny, allowing him to see his bones in his arms. However, what was strange was that on his whole body there was not a trace of the black spots or any other symptoms.

The moment the opposite party saw the priest enter, he immediately went on his knees and announced, “Your Reverence, my name is Needle, and I have important information to tell you.”

“You may speak.”

“But...” He looked up, drifted with his eyes to the other two people accompanying them in the secret room, indicating that he was hesitant to speak in front of outsiders.

“They don’t matter, they are Priest Shattrath, my right-hand,”

Ferry said. “And the other one is Grandma Hera, who is responsible for safeguarding and taking care of this secret room, almost never leaving this place.”

“Then I will speak but regarding the promised...”

“The Holy Elixir is here,” Ferry said, impatiently pulling out the blue vial. “As long as your information is valuable, I will, of course, heal you from the evil spirits.”

“Your Reverence, I assure you that this information is absolutely astonishing,” Needle proclaimed and raised his head. “Some people are continuously transporting the fugitives away, and they have empty ships everywhere on the canal, all this I have personally seen with my own eyes. I fear that within a few days they will be able to bring away all the refugees.”

“They are taking away those patients infected with the black spots?” Ferry frowned. “Are you sure you haven’t misread the situation?”

Previously he had already received the message that a fleet was transporting the refugees of the Eastern Region away, but something like this was quite normal. Those nobles always love it when the territory of another noble is stricken by natural disaster, this time it will allow them to plunder some workers for a very low price. Anyway, now that the demonic disease is running amuck those idiots will naturally be punished by God. However, now... after they know that the plague has infected the people, how can they still shelter the refugees?

“No, they are in possession of a cure for the demonic disease! After those mercenaries gave the patients a bag with some strange water to drink, the dark spots on their body quickly disappeared. Furthermore, they also claimed that they are coming from the Western Region, and as long as the refugees are willing to come along with the fleet, they would receive food, shelter, and remuneration for the work they have done.” Needle’s eyes paused on Ferry’s, “But the most astonishingly is that these people are working together with a witch!”

“What did you just say?”

“What I said is absolutely correct, Your Reverence!” Needle shouted, “I mixed in with the ranks of the fugitives and embarked on a ship. In the beginning, I hadn’t seen anything, but then somebody jumped from the ship, and the mercenaries on shore began to pursue him. Before long I noticed that there was a shadow circling in the sky, but it wasn’t a bird, it was a witch flying in the air. I was so scared that I did not dare to move. I waited until the ship had sailed several kilometers and I couldn’t detect a trace of the witch, before I took the next opportunity and dived into the water to escape. I almost needed a day to come back. “Needle rubbed his hands,” Your Reverence, do you believe now that this information is worth a bottle of Holy Elixir in exchange?

“Wait a minute, you said that they have a way to cure the demonic plague and that you also have drunk it, in other words, does that mean you were previously sick?” Ferry asked.

“Uh... That’s right, but didn’t you say, as long as I have valuable

information to offer, I can..." Needle grinned awkwardly, revealing a mouth of uneven yellow teeth.

So that's the reason, he doesn't want to use it but instead wants to take this bottle of Holy Elixir to the black market to sell it, after pondering for a moment Ferry asked again, "How many people does the other side have? Are you sure they were mercenaries from a caravan? "

"They assuredly were, they have no armor, no horses, and their weapons were a kind of wooden spear. As for their numbers..." Needle went with his hand through his hair, "Not more than a hundred people, at most!"

"To whom did belonged the ships?"

"This... I cannot tell, most of the ships haven't hung any flag, and even in case they had hung one up, I wouldn't be able to recognize them. But the mercenaries personally said that the fleet was leaving for the Western Region... ah... yes, he also mentioned that the recruitment was for the Lord of Border Town." Needle racked his brain to recall his words, "he was currently in the process of reclaiming the land, and thus the Lord needs a large workforce. That's all I can remember."

"Well, this was indeed a crucial news you had to offer," the priest took a deep breath and pulled a bottle of blue liquid from his pocket and threw it towards Needle, "Take it with you, it is yours."

"Th-thank you, Your Reverence!" Flustered the latter caught the

bottle, but suddenly his whole body began to tremble, and his eyes became huge. Only seeing a slender dagger sticking out of his neck, sending out a faint coldness, with the old and senile room manager suddenly standing behind him.

Chapter 228 - Faceless Person

The grannie retrieved her dagger, and let him fall to the ground. She then picked up the medicine bottle, rubbed it on her body to clean it and handed it back to the priest.

“Well done,” Ferry nodded, “Now drag him out and dispose his corpse.”

“Yes,” she answered with a husky voice, dragging the corpse without any effort, much unlike an old woman.

“Your Reverence, do you believe that he was telling the truth?” After the manager had left, Priest Shattrath asked, “That the caravan and the witches are working together, and if I remember correctly wasn’t it the 4th Prince, Roland Wimbledon who got assigned to Border Town?”

“Whether it is true or not we will only know after we send someone to examine it,” Ferry said with a serious expression. “But I think the possibility that he lied to us isn’t likely. As long as we send some eyes on top of the city walls to take a look, we should be able to notice the situation of the refugees. So if he wanted to fabricate a lie in exchange for the Holy Elixir, at least he would have taken one which would have been harder to verify.”

“I’ll send someone to review the situation right away,” the priest bowed.

“Go ahead and investigate the information, promptly come back

afterwards and report to me.”

Ferry slowly walked to the table, sat down, and started playing with the Elixir in his hands. These refugees had already been in the bag. After all, to control their movements and prevent them from fleeing from the demonic plague by themselves, he had dispatched the street rats from the Dreamland organization, and made them mix in with the refugees. There they should spread the news that the Church would soon come to save them. As long as they could endure for a few more days not only would they receive God’s redemption, there was also the possibility that they would be accepted by the Church, and become a citizen of King’s City. As for those rats, they were mostly already infected themselves, and because of this, they wouldn’t spare any effort to exchange for the Holy Elixir.

In case the information given by the rat was correct, it meant that this group of people had at least started transport the refugees away since yesterday. Moreover, according to their posture, it doesn’t like they would abandon the transportation, which was equivalent to severely hindering his own plans. Even more grave, it appeared that they were working together with a witch since Ferry was convinced that only a witch would be capable of curing the demonic plague.

“Your Reverence, the body has been taken care of.” The old woman walked back into the secret room and cautiously closed the door without making any noise, “Also, have some fallen really shown themselves?”

“Most likely,” Ferry lowered his voice, “and there are maybe

more than one.” For a moment he paused, “Furthermore, since no stranger is here, there is no need for you to pretend to be ugly, There is no stranger here, seeing you like this is detestable.”

“Yes.”

She bent down into a crab stance, followed by her whole body began to issue a crackling and rattling sound as if all the bones in her body began to rub in general. Followed by a rapid grows of her stature, in the blink of an eye her gray hair turned black, and her skin that was full of wrinkles and loose gradually began to tightening again. Becoming stretched taut but flexible once again, as if her body’s time had flowed backward. When she finally straighten her body, she had turned into a beautiful and enchanting woman.

“That’s much better,” Ferry smiled with satisfaction, “If I remember correctly, this fellow... had been hanged at the gate, right?”

“Yes, my Lord,” she nodded, “Of the four she is the one you spent the most time with.”

“You really... know how to please me,” the priest smacked his lips, “But I expect that Shattrath will be back soon, there isn’t enough time.” He suppressed his desire, “Furthermore, you still have to deal with the fallen ones.”

“Give them to me, my Lord,” she vowed while bowing. “I won’t let any of the fallen go.”

A quarter of an hour later, Shattrath returned to the secret room. He first looked at the witch, and then turned to the Ferry to report: “Your Reverence, outside of the western city many shadow are indeed missing. But within the dark I was unable to see it clearly, so I sent some subordinates carrying torches out to circle the area, only to discover that many tents were absolutely empty. However, there was no trace of flames to see from the dock area, so I cannot tell if the caravan is still stationed there, as for the witch...”

“No need to investigate,” Ferry interrupted him, “Since the other side dares to transport the fugitives away, the intelligence provided by the rat shouldn’t be wrong. This way, we know that their group has at least two witches with them, one that can fly and one who can eliminate the epidemic. Especially the latter, is a great threat to my plan, so we certainly must stop them. For now, they are still only treating the people outside the city, but if that witch were to come into the city and openly treat those who are infected, our own propaganda, claiming the Holy Elixir as their only solution will have become a joke!”

“What should we do?” the other priest asked, “Should we send out the Army of Judges to arrest the witch?”

Ferry shook his head, “This is King’s City and not the Holy City at Hermes. The Church has only around 20 Judges stationed here, but if we sent them out, who will keep the order tomorrow during the medicine distribution ceremony? Furthermore, their number is just too small, besides punishing them as a warning to others what would we really achieve? Even if they were able to defeat those mercenaries, the witches would most likely have already escaped.” Since we are in King’s City, the Army of Judges which is

responsible for maintaining order is merely at the size of dozen of people, otherwise, if it was at the scale of several hundreds of people, I am afraid the King couldn't sleep at night unless he subjugated us.

“Then... should we inform the Holy City, and ask the Bishop to send reinforcements?”

“By the time the Judges will have arrived, I am afraid the fugitives will already be long gone.” Ferry sneered, “Furthermore, for a group of mercenaries we won't need the elite army of the Church to deal with them, we will just give this matter to Dreamland to deal with.”

“To the rats?” Shattrath got started.

“At least they are numerous; allowing them to surround the dock in advance and then attack in a swarm all at once. What do you think, without wearing an armor and only being armed with wooden spears, how many rats can they handle?” He asked.

“About two or three people.”

“Therefore they will only be able to deal with around 200 people at maximum, while Dreamland can easily gather a mob of around 1000 people or more. Of course, these brave and aggressive dregs will never be able to attack in formation like the Army of Judges, but for just killing the group of mercenaries, they should be more than sufficient.” Ferry stood up, “Inform Fierce Teeth Tanis, that he has one day to gather his forces, the more, the better, tomorrow

night we will attack. Don't tell him that there are other ways to cure the disease and also do not say that they will have to deal with witches, just tell him to make sure that no one escapes. His payment will be a box of the Holy Elixir, if he wants to shirk away or he senses a lie, tell him, in case he doesn't help. he won't any longer get the poppy or sleep fern from me.

“But the witches... what should we do against them? Especially the one who can fly in the sky.”

“She won't be flying all the time, and the rats won't be able to end the fight in a short time, with other words... their only role is to attract the attention of the other side,” Ferry said, while walking to the witch, stretching out his hand to gently caress her face. “As long as Faceless sees an opportunity, she will sneak into their camp, completely beyond their notice.”

She only has to touch them once, and she will be able to completely disguise herself or someone else as the previously contacted person. But it is not only their appearance, but it is also even their stature and voice that she can perfectly imitate. And since the God's Stone of Retaliation cannot remove her ability, she will become an excellent assassin. It was for this reason that she became one of the few remaining and specially trained witches of the Church.”

“When the other party realizes that there is no way left for them to win, the camp is bound to turn into chaos, and at that time, Faceless will make sure that no witch will be able to survive.” The Priest began to laugh.

Chapter 229 - On The Eve Of The Day Of Return

On the third day, outside of King's City's eastern city gate.

Nightingale was hiding in her world of fog calmly watching the group of shabbily clothed refugees. Under Echo's sound manipulating ability, one wave of refugees after another gathered together and slowly moved with Sir Brian towards the pier.

Nowadays they no longer acted like they had two days ago, where they had to push their way through the refugees to reach the edge of the camp, always only breaking away small chunks at a time. After a significant number of refugees had been brought over the rest of them had also noticed the movement, so as long as a wave of people was pulled away from the edge, the rest would continue to come over. By now, even the guards on King's City's city wall had noticed the what happened at their foot, but from their point of view, they only wished that these stinking refugees would hurry and finally go away from here.

The whole project was currently progressing very smoothly, the number of refugees in the eastern district was already running low, while the people at the North Gate had taken the initiative to move closer to their side. Perhaps by sundown, they could already smoothly sail away with everyone.

At this time everyone seemed to be busy, only Nightingale seemed to be leisurely. Compared to Echo, surrounded by a layer of "mercenaries", who was responsible for drawing in the refugees, and Lily, who was under the heavy protection of the First Army

and constantly producing new purifying water, her own guards' work seemed to be redundant.

Only when the “mercenaries” had to carry patients who were too ill to move by themselves, was there a need for her to be vigilant. Just then, Nightingale noticed Echo raising her head to look at the magnificent east gate and softly sigh.

“What happened?” Nightingale asked after going over.

“It’s nothing, I’m just somewhat down,” Echo expression turned rather sad, “Before I had been sold to King’s City, I had to suffer the whole way along the road. Until now, I had always thought the reason that they were so cold to me was because of my identity as a Sandperson, which was something foreign to the people of Graycastle. But now it appears that they are equally ruthless to their own people, which shows me that there is not much difference between them and the people of Iron Sand City”.

Recalling that Echo had been bought and sold as a slave, Nightingale didn’t know how to answer her. In the end, she patted her on the shoulder and said comfortingly, “But not everyone is like them, there are also many people with good intentions, such as your sisters of the Witch Cooperation Association and also... His Highness.”

“Do you want to say... that His Highness can actually end the disputes?” Echo whispered, “Regardless if they live in the huge Kingdoms, the Sandnation, the Fjord, or are just ordinary people and the witches, do you believe that they can all live together freely and in peace, without needing to fight each other?”

“In case it is done by His Highness, I think it will be possible,” Nightingale replied in a cheerful tone, “And it isn’t those strange machines or the amazing guns that give me the feeling, no he himself is... I always feel as if His Royal Highness and we are not the same type of person.”

“Of course he is not like us. He is the Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle.”

“No, this feeling has nothing to do with his identity or his status,” she shook her head, “I’m unable to say from where exactly this kind of feeling is coming from, it is merely my intuition, nothing more. Maybe people like His Royal Highness, who can come up with so many strange and eccentric theories... even wanting to repeatedly study all of us witches’ abilities until he understands them thoroughly, just have a different train of thoughts than the other people. Anyway, if he was to achieve such an amazing thing, I don’t feel that it would be that strange.”

“You really have confidence in him,” Echo laughed out, immediately reducing the sad expression on her face, “I hope that one day, I will be able to go back to the South and meet with my people.”

Confidence? Regarding some aspects, yes, but regarding some others... she wasn’t so sure. Nightingale could not help but look towards the west, and ask herself what he was doing, now that she wasn’t at his side? Was he busy drawing those strange machines, or was he together with Anna... she forcefully shook her head, trying to disperse such thoughts.

Anyway, at the end of this day, we will depart back to Border Town, Nightingale thought, and when we get back, I can ask him anything I want, and he won't be able to lie to me.

...

At noon when they returned to the camp to rest, Lightning also slowly came down to land.

During these days, Lightning had the hardest task of all of them, she had to constantly fly patrol under the scorching sun high up in the sky. Especially for concealing her body, Lightning had to wear a special coat with "sky camouflage", which tightly wrapped itself around her body, and even covered her head. This clothes with their strange name were apparently not designed as beautiful clothes by His Highness. Its surface was coated with a mixed pattern of gray and blue, allowing her to almost integrate with the background as she flew. As long as someone didn't directly look at her, it would be hard to detect her.

After landing, the first thing the little girl did was to take off the coat, then grab a water pouch to quell her thirst. Nightingale discovered that her clothes were wet from the sweat inside and that her forehead and nose were also covered with sweat, while her windproof glasses had left marks on her white cheeks.

"It had been hard on you," Nightingale said and crouched down in front of her, beginning to wipe the sweat away.

“Fortunately, these people aren’t endlessly rushing over from the east,” Lightning stick out her tongue, “Or else I would really have passed out from this sun.”

“Will you be able to go home tomorrow?” Lily went dispirited and downcast to Lightning’s side. “I haven’t taken a shower for several days; by now, I feel uncomfortable from head to foot.”

Nightingale could not help but laugh aloud. Obviously, during their time in the Witch Cooperation Association; there had been times where they hadn’t bathed for half a month, and no one had complained about it back then, but now they did it already after a little more than a week. She suddenly had the thought that the development of the bathroom and soap was in truth His Royal Highness “conspiracy,” and after they had all become attached to those strange and useful things of his, it had become difficult for the witches to make a firm resolution to ever leave Border Town.

However, the calm did not last until the end of the shipment project, after lunch, His Highness’ man who was responsible for gathering news in King’s City, Theo, brought back some bad news.

“You mean that... Dreamland is gathering their forces, with the intention of surrounding the pier?” Iron Axed asked with a frown.

“Yes, they ‘might be’ preparing to encircle the pier.” Theo correct him, “The first part was determined to be true, while the latter part instead seems a bit bizarre, so my informants are not sure about it. At present, all other black street organizations have already begun to act, they are preparing themselves in case Dreamland unexpectedly attacks them. However, compared to

‘encircling the pier’ this news can just be seen as deliberately sending out some smoke, I believe that this news was leaked by themselves midway, which could be seen as quite common thing for the rats to do. After all, most members of the black street organization are nothing more than bullies or dregs, making it fundamentally impossible for them to be a tightly-knit group. If my intelligence is correct, then Dreamland must be subjected to another force’s command, otherwise wanting to depart from their own territory would be a very challenging affair for them.”

“They are just a gang of scoundrels,” it seemed Iron Axe wasn’t the least concerned, “If these people scatter in all direction, will it affect your plan of selling the medicine?”

“It shouldn’t,” Theo said, “They are unable to get their hands on the patrol, so it is unlikely that they can hinder me from entering and leaving through the side door. As for after we entered the city, the skeleton fingers will provide a force to protect the transport of the medicine. The only thing I’m worried about is you, because tonight I will have to stay in the city and supervising the sale of the purified water, so I’m afraid that it is impossible for me to see you off tomorrow morning.”

“It won’t matter,” Iron Axe patted his arm reassuringly, “In the future, His Highness will come in person to King’s City, we will see you again then.”

Just like Nightingale had predicted at with the arrival of dusk, the last ship carrying refugees set sail into the direction of Silver City. And the rest of the more than 300 who weren’t willing to leave King’s City, were ordered to disperse by Iron Axe.

Then they all evacuated to the other side of the canal, waiting for the curtain of night to descend.

Chapter 230 - Assassination (Part 1)

Before the sun had completely gone down, Faceless quietly swam through the canal, circling the mercenary camp and nearing it from behind.

Her real name was not really Faceless, but rather Aphra a name she liked very much, because it meant 'dust' and had been given to her in the New Holy City by Archbishop Heater. She loved this name, because dust was plain and not flowery. As long as it fell on the ground, one piece wasn't distinguishable from another, just like she wasn't generally.

Only in front of Heather, would Aphra restore her real appearance.

As a member of the arbitration tribunal, she assisted the Archbishop with handling a lot of those fallen, which includes their own witches who had attempted to revolt against the Church, as well as those corrupted secular believers. The reason she had been sent to King's City was to accomplish an essential mission: Transform a devote Presiding Judge into the King of Graycastle. As for capturing those fallen witches, it was just a part time exercise. Furthermore, she also liked to imitate those witches who were sentenced to get tortured, then experience it herself, from start to finish; sharing the pain of the fallen, and experience even more deeply what she had accomplished, in this way she could atone for her own Devil's power.

The camp of the other side was erected very cleverly, it was directly by the shore at an elevation surrounded by open land,

making it difficult to observe their whereabouts from a lower level, and the witch in the sky prevented her from coming any closer. Aphra had to lurk in a farm warehouse, and wait until nightfall before she could take action.

When the night enveloped the earth, she surprisingly discovered that the situation has changed.

All of the mercenaries had withdrawn from the pier area, and completely fallen back inside the camp. Those foolish Dreamland rats had went so far as to hold some torches up, while gathering together in one place. It looked as if they wanted to tell the other side “Someone is coming to attack the camp”. Even if there wasn’t a flying witch, as long as the mercenary group wasn’t blind, they could make out with one glance when the other side would be coming.

What bad luck, her heart became gloomy, if the enemy judged that the number of rats were too many, there wouldn’t be any chance of winning, so they would certainly just retreat to the east. Although it was a taboo to march during the night, if it meant that they could save their life by escaping and splitting up, this taboo wouldn’t matter so much anymore. While the men that belong to Dreamland who should have already encircled the camp, were still at the other side of the pier, and were relying on a few wooden rafts to slowly cross the river. When they had finally set foot on the other side, Aphra was afraid that the other party would have already run away long ago. Making the rats to chase the enemy during the night, would be impossible, but how was she now supposed to find those damned witches?

Aphra hurriedly rushed toward the camp, hoping to merge in with their ranks before they began their retreat.

But after rushing over, she saw an entirely unexpected scene, she discovered that the mercenaries had all assembled themselves nearby.

There were still people patrolling around the camp, and the bonfire burned high, which allowed her to see their silhouettes come and go, showing an orderly picture and not the scene of chaos she had expected.

Did they not choose to retreat?

After a while of careful observation, Aphra confirmed her judgment, at the same time a delighted feeling began to spread through her body. Although she didn't know for what reason the other side decided to stay rather than escape as quickly as they could, but with this decision their ending had become predestined. She drew a dagger from her waist, observed the sentry's actions, and aimed for their weakest position.

Apart from giving her the essential skills to survive in the outside world, Archbishop Heater had also taught her how to fight and kill. While her opponents were not battle-hardened elite mercenaries, which she could see from the arrangements of the sentinels. Taking advantage of the moment the mercenary turned to survey another area, she came in from a low and blind angle and quickly threw herself at him, one hand covering his mouth from behind, and the other masterfully stabbing a knife into his neck.

After quietly killing the mercenary, keeping one hand on top of her enemy she placed the other hand on her own chest, casting her deformation ability. This could be a long or it could be a short process: When she had replaced the King through a substitute, to ensure a long-term effect she had exhausted almost all of the magic in her body and the conversion time had lasted nearly half an hour. But this time, there was no need to try so hard, within the blink of an eye she had turned into the mercenary. Even though the effect would only last for half a day, it would be more than enough time for the assassination.

Before the other patrol had returned, with lightning speed, she pulled down the other's clothes and put them on herself. Afterward, she dragged his body into the wheat fields. However, when faced with the mercenaries weapon, she became a little confused. The weapon in her hands looked like an iron barrel with a wooden handle that did not have a lance at its tip but rather a swarthy hole.

What is this weapon?

Even after thinking about it for a long time, she was still unable to find the answer, but seeing that the other patrol member was returning, without a better choice Aphra recalled the mercenary's previous appearance and carried it on her shoulder, assuming the appearance as if she was earnestly doing her sentry duty.

Like on so many previous assassinations, when the other guard passed her, he didn't discover anything strange about her.

Aphra wasn't in a hurry to enter the camp to search for the witch's whereabouts, after all, her replacing technique could only imitate the external form, but didn't allow her to read their memories. So, in case she met one of his acquaintances she would easily be exposed. Thus she decided to wait until these troops were in a state of disorder, which would provide her with the liberty of choosing between countless opportunities.

When the moon was hanging high up in the night sky, the Dreamland fools had finally crossed the canal, and were moving closer to the camp. The moment she heard the call of another sentry and saw the patrols and mercenaries withdrawing to the camp, she knew that her chance had come.

Following the crowd into the camp, Aphra ??was surprised to find out that the other side had far more than only a hundred people. Forming a big circle, they were surrounded by the entire top of the small slope and where either crouching or standing, holding the strange pole in their hands, and always pointing the hole towards the enemy.

But she had not the time to take a further look, taking advantage of the group's attention being focused elsewhere, she bent over and entered the nearest tent.

Soon, battle cries drifted over from the outside, cut off by a burst of the fierce explosion. Frightening Aphra into a little jump with its intense and almost unceasingly noise.

What the hell was going on? On impulse, she wanted to take a look, but then she regained her control back and calmly waited.

After some time, the camp became busy again, and she heard a lot of footsteps and shouted commands, which probably their attempts to adjust their defense in accordance to the enemy's attack. But slowly Aphra became anxious, what took them so long, why hadn't they attacked the top of the slope yet?!

A while later again, the sounds of explosion gradually thinned out, and when Aphra was no longer able to hear the rats fighting her heart sunk, is... it possible that the Dreamland wastrels were defeated?? Even if the number of mercenaries has been doubled, they were still only 200 – 300 people, surrounded by more than a thousand rats. With this numbers and by attacking from all sides, were they still unable to set foot at the top of the hill?

It seems as if the opportunity was slipping out of her hands.

Making a quick decision, Aphra left the tent, trying to reach the center of the camp. There she would wait for the end of the battle. After all, during the roll call it would be nearly impossible for her to hide from all of their eyes. This really wasn't how she had planned the infiltration, she was neither familiar with the mercenaries staff nor did she know their password, so she had to act quickly.

Bypassing two tents, Aphra slowly poked around the edge, looking at the center of the camp. There she saw four women sitting around a bonfire, they were most probably the witches their intelligence had spoken off. Although the number wasn't right again, from the beginning of this operation, the damned report hadn't been accurate. Furthermore, for her it didn't make a

difference if she had to kill two or four witches, anyone who was suspected to be corrupted needed to be tortured. And in case the time was too short for torturing, they at least all had to be killed, even if they weren't really corrupted, sacrifices were always necessary.

After she carefully observed her surrounding and decided upon a safe escape route, Aphra stood up from behind the tent, pretending as if nothing had happened as if she was just moving closer to the fire.

Just when she had reached the middle of the open space, Aphra ??felt a cold hard object press against her back.

“Don't move,” a woman voice sounded. “Who are you?”

Chapter 231 - Assassination (Part 2)

A chill spread over Faceless' body. This... how was this possible?

She swallowed the saliva, then lowered her voice, "What kind of joke is this? I'm Vorte."

It shouldn't be possible that they are lucky enough to know each other, there are so many mercenaries within the camp. Don't tell me, that she can remember every one of their names, how can that be??

She never expected to receive the sarcastic answer she got in response, "Is that so? I never knew men could also gather magic in their bodies. So, either you are a witch that had planned to infiltrate the camp, or you are an extremely unlikely wizard. No matter what the truth is, it is impossible that your name is "Vorte" as you have claimed. Within the soldiers of the First Army, there is definitely no one with such a different body type."

Can this person... see the Devil's power? Aphra's heart finally sank to the depths; she now knew how she had been found out. There were more than four witches in the camp, and the woman behind her must be a witch as well. Moreover, she had an ability that was similar to the Eye of Truth. The Church's scriptures about magic had records of such an ability which had several hundred of derivations and all of them were not in conflict with the witch's ability.

Since I haven't seen someone within my surroundings or getting

close... does it mean that the other side's prime ability is hide her body?

“Now, kneel down, and put your hands behind your back, maybe I can spare your life then,” the woman shouted with a clear voice, “Do as I say!”

The mercenaries in the surrounding were still occupied with fighting, so they didn't notice the scene playing out at the central area, but that wasn't the case for the four witches near the fire though. They became aware of the abnormal situation as they cast their eyes over and asked, “What's the matter, Nightingale? Did something happen?”

This was her last chance, Aphra knew that her own strength was assassination and not related to an open battle, especially in the case where she wasn't wearing a God's Punishment Stones which would have suppressed most witches' fantastic abilities.

In case the witch who can fly is able to run away it won't do any harm. However, the witch who can cure the demonic plague definitely has to die here. Otherwise, she will pose a serious threat to the Church's future plans.

Of course, there was also the possibility, that after killing the other side, she herself wouldn't be able to escape. Thinking of this possibility, she couldn't help herself from getting a tight feeling in her chest, but she soon calmed down again. Recalling that in order for the Church's goal to unify the Four Kingdoms, no effort should be spared to resist the Devils from hell. And there were already many good soldiers who had sacrificed themselves for the greater

good, and it would be a proud moment for her to join them.

Furthermore, she believed that Heather would not forget her, Heather would make sure that her name would also be recorded in the sacred scriptures.

“You mustn’t come over,” shouted the witch called Nightingale. “There is—”

At this split second, she suddenly raised her elbow to beat against her enemy’s arm, simultaneously bowing her head to avoid being stabbed with her weapon. “When you are talking, it is impossible to always pay attention. Thus there is the saying of ‘holding one’s breath in concentration’,” was what her drillmaster repeatedly taught her. “Instead, regardless whether you are attacking or are trying to escape, the optimum moment to act is when the other side starts talking.”

Within her sleeve she had concealed a mechanism that activated at the first moment of contact. Spraying a white alchemic powder to the rear, which on contact with water would release a lot of heat. In case the enemy got any of it inside their mouth or eyes, they would immediately lose their fighting strength. Even if they were lucky enough not to breathe any of the fine powder in, they would at least be flustered for a while.

Afterward, Aphra immediately pounced towards the four witches at the fire, the witch with golden hair quickly flew up, while the one witch who seemed to be the oldest disregarded her own safety and stepped in front of the other two. Drawing out her sharp dagger, Aphra immediately stabbed directly toward the first witch.

Since they couldn't escape anyway, and all three of them would die under her hand, it wasn't necessary to differentiate them according to priority.

Just at the moment when her dagger pierced the other side's body, Aphra saw an incredible scene.

A white shadow appeared in front of her at a place which was definitely still empty a second ago, with two blazing eyes glaring at her from under its hood.

Is... this Nightingale who stood behind me?

At the eruption of the fine powder she was at close range, so why doesn't she seem to have been affected? Almost disbelieving her eyes, Faceless saw the other side lift her arm and a flame burst out from the silver weapon. And then her body was firmly pushed backward, resulting in her losing her balance, sending her backward to the ground, looking upwards. That's not good; there are... still two important people I need to dispose of. Aphra wanted to stand up, wanted to draw her dagger and stab at the next witch, but right now, even raising her hand had already become tough, and her consciousness had already begun to blur.

What a pity... was the last thought flashing through her mind.

...

After letting off the shot, Nightingale remained at the same

place, watching the soldier who had been hit in the chest fall down. Then the body began to twist and shrink, slowly turning back into the appearance of an unknown woman.

This had been her first time killing another witch.

It was not until Lily anxiously called out to her that Nightingale came back to herself.

Suppressing the surging emotion within her heart, she put away the gun, ran back to Wendy's side.

"Where is the injury?"

"It's nothing, I just feel a little pain," Wendy waved her hand, indicating that they should not panic, "She shouldn't have been able to pierce through."

"Does that mean the protective suit worked?"

"I suppose it has," Undoing the bottoms on her chest, she saw the slender dagger hanging on the side of her clothes, the moment the jacket was opened, the knife fell out of the hole and landed on the ground, with no blood held on its tip. Of the protective clothing, only the outer layer had a small hole in it, while the soft inner layer still remained intact.

"Y-you really scared me," Lily said, releasing a long breath, and then fell with buttocks on the ground. "Next time don't rush to me

to help me resist the sword! I don't need you to do this for m-m-me..."

"Well," Wendy gently stroked her head, "Am I not alright?"

Lily pulled her head free and buried it in Wendy's bosom, releasing a muffled cry.

"I was also scared, merely attending to obstruct her by stepping ahead, totally forgetting to use my power" Wendy shook her head. "If I had sent a strong gust of wind against her, she wouldn't have been able to thrust towards me."

"It's because you are rarely fighting with others, so a reaction like that is quite normal," Nightingale comforted.

"Fortunately you were wearing the protective clothing," Echo said, still showing a scared look, "Otherwise, this time would have been much more dangerous than it was."

Before their departure, His Royal Highness had given each of them a special vest, furthermore, he had demanded that they must never take this piece of clothing off at any time. Even though it seemed a little thick, it was still very light to wear. Seemingly made out of many layers, His Highness had explained that each layer had been coated by Soraya, giving it a high degree of flexibility, but also making it hard to pierce through with sharp objects. It offered excellent protection against swords, bows, and crossbows. If it hadn't helped her to resist the thrust, Wendy would most probably never have survived long enough to reach

Nana.

Lightning slowly landed next to the dead witch and asked, “Why did she attack us? Aren’t we... the same?”

Nightingale stared at the lifeless woman, unable to speak for a long time. With the witch’s eyes closed, the long blue hair scattered on the ground and her peaceful expression, the other doesn’t seem to have experienced much pain. But she still couldn’t forget, that when she had stabbed at Wendy, she hadn’t shown any trace of hesitation in her eyes, only the determination that what she was doing was inevitable and righteous. As if she was not killing a person, but rather fulfilling her life’s philosophy. Perhaps in her heart, this had been the right behavior.

“No,” Nightingale softly sighed. “She’s wasn’t one of us... she was just, a lamentable person.”

Chapter 232 - Shadow Islands

“The Fjord possess countless islands. Until now, no one had ever passed the beyond the border of all these islands,” a man with a tall stature and a rough and vigorous appearance told them, “The further east you sail, the more unpredictable the climate will become, and the same also applies to the islands. I really do not know, what degree of strangeness they eventually reach.”

“Even you have never reached the end of the islands?” Tilly asked curiously. “They say you are the most outstanding explorer of the Fjord, apart from you, there are only a few who dare cross the Searing Flame Island and continue sailing eastwards.”

“Ha ha ha,” the man began to laugh heartily. “Your praise is too much. In fact, every year there are brave people of the Fjord who sail eastwards in search for new land, but it’s hard for them to find anything new. With the raging hurricanes and the suddenly appearing fog, it eventually becomes impossible for the ships to move even a single step further.

He is Thunder, Ashes remembered, the first explorer to discover the Shadow Islands. But two years ago, within the perils of the sea his whereabouts suddenly became unknown, and by now many people think that he has already died. She had never thought that he would be on Sleeping Island, and even less that the 5th Princess would come to him with an agreement that he would help to open up new sea routes for Sleeping Island, draw a sea map and search for new ruins, while Tilly would send witches to support his explorations. As for the reason for his disappearance during the last two years, she had never heard him mentioning it, and Tilly had also never spoken about it. But she had the feeling that Her

Majesty knew the inside story. Otherwise, they would never have reached such a mutual understanding. This point caused Ashes to feel slightly unhappy within her heart.

“Just like yesterday’s hurricane?”

“That’s right. They appear within the blink an eye and disappear just as quickly,” Thunder shook his pipe, and threw the ashes into the sea then refilled it with some grass leaves before igniting his pipe once more, “If it weren’t for the magical ability of your witch”

“Her name is Molly,” Ashes remind him stiffly.

“Ah, that’s right, look at my memory,” Thunder didn’t seem to mind her, he just scratched the back of his head and began to laugh, “If it hadn’t been for Molly, I am afraid the ship would have been overturned, her ability is simply fantastic. I had already often thought, that perhaps the witches were most suitable to be explorers.

“Isn’t that already the case,” Tilly smiled, “... a witch who had already inherited the name of the most outstanding Explorer?”

“Well...” Thunder took a deep breath through the pipe, and afterward send out a long string of smoke, “I wish for it to be so.”

There it was again; Ashes frowned, they once more said something I cannot understand. She bluntly left the bow, instead going to the stern trying to calm her emotions. Her Majesty

seemed to be very urgent to explore the ruins, after cleaning the Fjord of the Church, she had immediately made all arrangements to go out to sea. And to her surprise, Her Majesty unexpectedly also said that she wanted to go in person, regardless of how Ashes tried to discourage her, it was all useless.

Arriving in the stern, she saw Molly sitting there controlling her magic servant who in turn was holding a fishing rod, learning how to fish from the sailors. Even though the sailors seemed to oppose it when the witches first got on board, but since yesterday's hurricane, everyone's attitude had turned completely upside down. Molly had summoned her servant and ordered it to rapidly expand, swallowing the middle part of the ship, making it impossible for anything to reach them, whether it was the rain or the wind. Although the ship was hit by one surging wave after another, making it move up and down, the hull still remained as stable as always. Nowadays, each of the sailors treated the witches as their good luck charm, even going so far as saying that in the future they would be too afraid to go to sea if a witch didn't accompany them.

“Elder Sister Ashes, look at the big fish I caught!” Molly pointed to the barrel behind her, inside there laid a scaleless sea fish with long, sharp, and pointed mouth, looking completely different than the river fishes she had seen in Graycastle.

“What is this?”

“Swordfish, they like to follow and travel together with the ships, but sometimes they will attack the hull with their mouth, and break it apart,” a sailor replied, “But they are also very

delicious to eat, especially the belly meat, after you put it in your mouth, it melts like ice on your tongue.” He smacked his lips, “This evening everyone can enjoy the freshly cooked swordfish for themselves.”

“It seems as if I’ve got another fish,” Molly shouted.

Ashes merely saw a dark shadow moving under the dark blue water surfaces, but along with the magical servant’s movement of the rod, the shadow became bigger and bigger, breaking through the water surface soon.

“Th-this is,” the sailor stared blankly, “No, quickly throw away the fishing rod!”

His voice hadn’t fallen yet, as already a monstrous creature jumped out of the water, its broad mouth wide open, directly flowing to Molly wanting to swallow her.

In a moment it would have consumed the whole target, but Ashes was even faster than this monster. She picked Molly up with her left hand while drawing her huge sword with her other hand, directly striking it on the head.

The Monster issued a pained scream as it was sent from the air onto the planks. Then quickly began to move its six-foot-long body, trying to flee back into the water, however, Ashes never let it have the opportunity. She put Molly down, grabbed her sword with the reverse grip and nailed the monster directly onto the deck.

For a moment it continued to twitch, then it spat out a string of white bubble from its mouth soon stopping all movement.

“What is this?” At this moment Ashes finally had the opportunity to take a careful look at the monster before her eyes. It somewhat resembled a fish, yet it also had short crab-like legs. The wide open mouth was almost as big as she herself was and was filled with dense rows of sharp teeth. But the most disgusting thing was the pair of hairy arms growing from the side of its mouths, which was even split up into five fingers, just looking like a human hand in general.

“A variation of the sea ghosts!” the still shocked sailor answered, patting his chest, “They often disguise themselves as fish and take the angler’s bite and drag them back into the water. Furthermore, I have also heard, that only after eating a human, will they be able to grow their hands! ”

“Your last part is just an unfounded rumor,” someone said from behind. Turning around, Ashes discovered that Thunder and Tilly had both come over.

“Captain!” the sailor shouted, abashedly stuck out his tongue and quickly stepped aside.

“The more sensational a rumor is, the more inaccurate it is,” Thunder came over and kicked against one of the monster’s legs, “In fact, it also has another name with which you are perhaps more familiar with.”

“Which one?” Ashes asked.

“Demonic Beast,” he stated slowly.

“Sir Thunder, fog ahead!” The lookout suddenly shouted.

“Everyone cheer up!” Then Thunder loudly ordered, “Put the sail down; we are now entering the Shadow Sea!”

Ashes noted, that just moments ago the sunny and cloudless sky had suddenly become all gloomy, turning the blue sea into a dark shade, as if a mass of ink was spreading under the water surface. The entire ship was soon enclosed by a dense fog, standing at the stern of the ship she couldn't even see the figurehead that was at the bow.

“What's going on?” Tilly could not help but grab Ashes' arm.

“It's the proof that we aren't sailing in the wrong direction,” Thunder jokingly stated. “When the Shadow Islands emerge from the sea, the sea will create a thick mist. Of course, the correct way to say it would be that the seawater is just at low tide, around ten feet (3.3m) lower than it is normally. The massive decline will produce a large amount of mist and reefs that will appear everywhere. So, if we are even a little careless, we will sink ourselves. Now, I will need your help to ensure that the ship doesn't smash against something.

After his words, all the people came to the bow, and just like they had done during the hurricane, Molly's servant expanded as far as it could. Swallowing the bow and even reached into the water, so even if the bow hit against a reef, her magic servant would be the first to feel it.

"In case you didn't have us witches, what did you do then?" Ashes asked.

"Then we would only be able to rely on our patience and luck," Thunder sighed, "The fleet would send out a small boat in front of it as a pathfinder, and after receiving confirmation that the path is safe, we would follow after it. But this area of the sea is not peaceful. As you have seen before, the closer you come to the Shadow Islands; the greater the danger becomes. There is the fog, the reefs, and the sea monsters... That is also why, even so though many explorers had already reached this place, only a few of them were able to find the entrance to the ruins.

After sailing like this for about two hours, the fog gradually vanished, allowing Ashes to see more and more from the surrounding islands. But only a scarce bits of vegetation was to be seen, besides some green moss or algae, there were only many crustaceans that were climbing over the rocks. "Will all these islands sink into the water?"

"That's right, just like on Sleeping Island, but here the tide and low tide interval are much faster, changing around every half-moon cycle." Thunder replied, "Moreover its rise and fall speed is incredibly quickly, as if there is a huge hole at the bottom of the sea which swallows all of the surrounding water. I even think that

the reason why the sea level in the Fjord change, is related to this place. If you are lucky, we can even see how the main island will raises out of the sea.

Chapter 233 - Ancient Ruins

The further east they sailed, the thinner the fog became, but the sky still remained gloomy as if the sun was unable to reach this part of the sea.

The surrounding reefs also got higher and higher, gradually turning into sturdy stone pillars, Ashes didn't know why the ship was still stable, even though the water level was steadily falling. Even the rolling sea waves have lost their power, including the spray, which was now as tranquil as a lake without wind.

“Why don't you just wait for the seawater to reach the lowest level before you enter the Shadow Sea?” Tilly asked, puzzled, “Then you do not have to be afraid of hitting the rocks, after all, by then all the reefs will be exposed.”

“Because if we wait until the seawater ebbed away, we won't be able to see the Ghost Red River, which shows us explorers the only channel leading to the ruins,” Thunder explained. “These pillar-like islands you see everywhere aren't fixed, with each ebb and flow their position will change. And it must be said that the seawater will swallow the majority of these pillars, so they cannot be used to locate the direction.

“Ghost... Red River?” Tilly asked, confused.

“That's right. Look, there it is—” Thunder whistled and pointed to the bow.

Looking in the direction he pointed, the witches saw the dark blue sea, with a few red figures within – flashing through their view, like a phantom. But soon, another two or three red shadows came drifting along, and this time Ashes could clearly make out their bodies, they were fish, that had completely red scales.

“Are they... fish?”

“They are the unique red scales fish from Shadow Island,” Thunder stroked his chin and laughed, “Later on you will see the actual color of the Ghost Red River.”

Gradually, more and more fish were gathered together, no longer just the small groups of just two or three. Instead, they had gathered together in massive swarms, collectively swimming in the direction the stern was pointing – looking far ahead, Ashes was stunned by the scene she saw. More and more fish had come together to form a powerful current, making it appear as if there was a thick dark red carpet within the sea. The sailing ship visibly sailed forward along this red line, and when the bulge passed through the shoal of fish, from time to time sounds of collisions could be heard.

So, that’s the reason. Ashes suddenly recognized that this was the Ghost Red River – a strange nonexistent river! As the ship continued to move forward, the dense shoal of fish expanded to such an extent that the channel could accommodate several ships side by side. Slowly the dark blue water seemed to completely disappear as if the sailing ship was traveling on top of the fish. If they hadn’t been moving in opposite directions, Ashes would even believe that the ship was being carried by these fish.

“Why are they doing this?” Tilly asked in surprise.

Ashes also very much wanted to ask this question, she had absolutely never seen such a scene before, in Greycastle or any other Kingdom, – covered in dense fog, under a gloomy sky, the bizarre huge rocks and the red scaled fish forming a “river”. For the first time, she was awed by the wonder of the sea.

“It is because of the main island,” Thunder said, “It’s just like a triangular spire, with a massive cave running through the middle of it where these red-scaled fish like to lay their eggs and give birth to the next generation. Then during the ebb, the cave will emerge out of the water, and the shoal of fish that are staying in that habitat will always be the first to experience the change of water level will begin rushing out. So as long as we just follow the Red River, we will be able to arrive at the main island of the Shadow Islands.”

“Captain Thunder, there is a huge obstacle ahead! It looks like a mountain!” the lookout suddenly shouted.

“It seems that we are reaching our goal,” Thunder said, shaking his pipe, “Ladies, welcome to the Shadow Islands.

Not long after, Ashes finally saw the main island appear. Just like Thunder had said, it looked as if several pieces of it had come together forming a triangle which was wide at the base and narrow at the top, with a surface which at first glance looked very smooth, not at all resembling a natural creation. But believing that the

whole spire had been sculpted by people was a bit too hard to believe. Just the exposed part of the tower already reached the size of half of King's City, while the hole in its middle was large enough to entirely enclose the Tower of Babel the church has built at Hermes.

The sea was still retreating, and water rushed out of the cave just like a waterfall, while the shoal of fish completely covered the parts of the island that were still emerging. As far as Ashes could see, the whole sea had been dyed red, letting her wonder, if perhaps millions of scarlet red fish had been living in the cave.

Waiting until the sky had turned dark, the sea water finally retreated, revealing the bottom of the cave. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Thunder ordered his sailor to stop the ship and connect it with a long, thick hemp rope to a copper stake. Standing at the edge of the gigantic cave, you could see right through it to the mouth at the other side – yet light coming in from both sides could still only illuminate a minuscule area, with the center of the cave being almost pitch black, causing people feel an ineffable oppression.

“Did you left these stakes behind the last time you were here?” Ashes asked.

“No,” Thunder shook his head, “When I came here for the first time, they had already been here. It should be the former inhabitants of the ruins who built them.”

“The ruins... where are they?”

He smiled and pointed upwards. “Just above us, we’re at the entrance to the ruins.”

...

The following part of the journey could only be described with one word, inconceivable. The witches followed Thunder and his sailors and entered the gigantic hole through a stone gate, following the stone steps, along which the water was still flowing down, taking one step at a time, slowly spiralling towards the top. Even though everyone was holding a torch, their flickering flames only allowed an extremely limited view, hiding the end of the staircase in darkness. And making them feel both weak and small.

When they proceeded through the darkness of the abyss, Tilly tightly grabbed Ashes’ arm, no longer showing her usual calm and composed expression.

This is the princess I know all too well, Ashes thought. Even in the palace, she had always followed her own ideas. The 5th Princess who confronted any challenge with confidence, had only one weakness, her fear of darkness. Even in the middle of the night, her room had to always be lit with candles. And after their escape from the palace, whenever it was impossible to do so, she would ask Ashes to accompany her in her sleep.

While walking inside of the damp and dark spire, Ashes mood instead became a lot more cheerful.

All along the way they didn't come across any demonic beast or any mechanism to block intruder – even if they had, after being immersed in the seawater for so long, it would have most likely lost its effectiveness by now. The only problem was the endless climbing which physically exhausted a large part of their group, slowing everyone's movement more and more. So when the stone steps finally came to an end, the whole team could not help but burst into cheers.

The last barrier was not a stone door, but a door made out of metal, which brightly reflected the torchlight. Stepping forward, Thunder placed his hands on it and pushed, slowly opening the massive door panels with an ear-piercing screeching sound.

Grabbing her sword with one hand, Ashes was the first to enter the room. Only after confirming that there was no danger, were Tilly and the other witches allowed to step into the hall.

After hanging the torches along the walls, a large hall appeared in front of everyone – although wide, the room seemed empty, one glance was enough to have see the whole room and come to the conclusion that there was nothing worth finding here.

“This is the ruins?” She removed the dirt from a green stone table with the palm of her hand, “Apart from some stone tables and stools, there is nothing else here.”

“Indeed, there is not much left,” nodded Thunder, “The ruins have slept at the bottom of the sea for too long, apart from stone,

everything else it hard to conserve. I already told it to Her Highness Tilly beforehand, but she still insisted on seeing it for herself.”

“The red stone, where did you find it?” Tilly opened her mouth and asked. “Where, exactly, did you find it?”

“Right away on the ground, at that time, they were scattered all over the place, there were probably dozens of them.

However, there was now nothing left, when Ashes looked at the ground she saw nothing besides the ground covered in seaweed that also made it slippery. After the ruins were discovered by Thunder, many other explorers had arrived here, one after another had come to plunder this place, so if they were able to find a magic stone, it would be a curious occurrence.

But Tilly was still in high spirits, holding her torch up high, she carefully searched through every corner of the hall, especially in the darker places which was where she would ask the sailors to come over with some more torches. Meanwhile, Molly summoned her magical servant, letting it spread over the ground, turning it into a cushion for everyone to rest on. Ashes instead kept herself constantly at Tilly’s side, and overlooked her feeling the wall to examine it.

“Hey,” the 5th Princess suddenly shouted and stopped, “What is this?”

When Ashes looked down at Tilly’s hand, she merely saw a piece

of a wall covered with green algae, but then she discovered a faint reflection of their flames.

Tilly immediately reached out with her hands to tear the algae off, exposing a gem half buried into the wall to their eyes – it had a prism-like shape, and was almost arm thick, and sparkled as brightly in its scarlet color. But it seemed to be inlaid in a golden frame, like a card slot to be fixed inside. Even soaked in seawater for so long and the gold just like the stone was as bright and clean as if it was new.

Tilly tried to pulling out the stone, but the precious gem didn't move a single bit.

“Let me try it,” Ashes offered.

The 5th Princess shook her head, seemingly thinking about something, she then put her hand on the prism and closed her eyes.

Suddenly, a brilliant light flashed through the center of the prism – when nothing further happened, Ashes already thought that her eyes had played her a trick on her. But then, a rumbling sound could be heard coming from behind the wall, as if a mechanism had suddenly began to move, in no time the sound spread through the entire hall. It seemed as if the rumbling noise was coming from everywhere, followed by the sudden appearance of a soft light on top of the wall, even the ceiling above their head began to light up.

Not knowing what was going on, the Sailor stood up in panic and

pulled out their weapons. But as they did not know from which side they should defend themselves they ultimately decided to gather together standing back to back. Molly's servant once more enclosed them in its magical embrace.

However, no monster appeared or rushed at them.

When the sound finally calmed down, the hall started shining in bright light.

Chapter 234 - “Gate”

“This is... how did you do it?” Thunder, not believing his eyes, stared at the walls with his mouth hanging wide open.

On top of the walls, tens of small holes opened up and each of them contained a stone which emitted a pure white light. But not only on the wall, even at the edge of the ceiling this fantastic stones were embedded, surrounding the whole room. In the soft light of the stones, every detail within the hall became visible at a glance.

It was the first time that Ashes saw the explorer show such an expression, and seeing it immediately filled her heart with joy, “Don’t you know? By willing magical power into these stones, witches can arouse additional abilities.”

“Then what is with these stones, are they also Magic Stones?”

Thunder cautious and solemn took one piece of the light stones and held it within his hands, but even after taking it out of the hole, the light the stone released didn’t weaken to the slightest amount.

“I don’t know,” Tilly shook her head. “These stones may have been here for hundreds of years – in case the ruins have such a long history. Previously they were all hidden behind a slate, therefore not visible to our eyes. And if you want to start the unique mechanism, you can only accomplish it with a witch’s ability.”

“Wasn’t it you who lit them light up?”

“No, the ability to light up comes from the stones themselves,” Tilly grabbed another piece of the magic stones and held it in front of her eyes, the pure white light then caressed her beautiful face, “In case they were a device which required magic in the same way that the flame cannot easily leave the candle. From my perspective, besides containing these stones, there is nothing special about the holes in the wall.

“If it really is like you said and they can light on their own, and they continued to light for hundreds of years, then their value is practically unable to be estimated,” Thunder clicked his tongue in wonder. “You must know that the Kingdom of Eternal Winter produces crystals, which have the size of a fist already sell for several hundred of gold royals, but their brightness is even less than half of this.”

The moment the sailor heard such an astonishing price, their kind of gaze with which they looked at the stones immediately changed.

“According to our agreement, you can take away half,” Tilly non-committally stated as if this was none of her concern. Now that she had sufficient light, she began exploring the hall even more carefully. Unable bear seeing Tilly tear at the seaweed with her own hands, Ashes bluntly lifted her huge sword and swung it, sweeping away the seaweed on the wall as if she was simply mowing grass. A second stone embedded within the wall was quickly uncovered.

In accordance with the previous method, Tilly once more poured her magic into it. Along with a sharp and clear sound of metal clashing, everyone was amazed to see, how a huge stone slab tilted down above Tilly's head. It was connected with taut copper ropes on both sides and in between them there were unexpectedly a neatly chiseled out flight of steps. One side of the stone slab finally stopped on the ground, while the other end led to the ceiling, looking upwards Ashes saw a horizontal metal door blocking the end of the passage.

“Tilly,” Seeing that the 5th Princess didn't hesitate to climb the stone steps, Ashes couldn't help and shout out loud, “Let me go first.”

“It does not matter, this time it isn't the... treasure chamber,” she quickly climbed to the top of the stone staircase, placed her hand on a magic stone beside the door, and as if was answering her, the metal door quickly opened.

Seeing Tilly climbing through the door, disappearing in the ceiling, Ashes had no alternative other than to follow closely while keeping her sword at hand.

The moment Ashes went through a hole in the roof, her eyes went wide, above the ceiling was another room, which was much smaller than the hall below, while the walls were also embedded with illumination stones – but what surprised her the most, was that there were nearly no traces of water here.

Wooden tables, chairs, shelves, cabinets... all the furnishings were still intact, they were only covered with a thick layer of dust,

and she could even see some broken spider webs. The shelves were all filled with rows of books that were dyed gray from the dust. In addition to the spread-out book on the table, a cup was also placed together with a kettle, and a pen-holder. From the quill, only a lone pole was remaining and the ink had long since dried up. But even then, this room full with filled with shelves and the hall below was covered with algae seemed to be two completely different worlds.

Thunder, who was the third one to climb the stairs, sucked in a mouth of cold air when he looked around in wonder, “This is...”

“An abandoned dwelling place,” Tilly answered and took up the unfolded book on the table. She gently removed the dust from it and afterward began to look through the pages, “It seems that somebody had lived here for a very long time.”

“What is written in the book?”

“I’m unable to read it,” She shook her head and showed the book to the other two, “The text is written in symbols I have never seen before.”

“It seems that the books on the shelves are the same,” Ashes said, while removing the dust on the spines, revealing a text written in strange wavy lines, leaving her unable for her to grasp its meaning.

“We can take them back with us and study them slowly,” Tilly laughed. “By agreement, all the books and magic stones we discovered belong to us.”

“Of course,” Thunder touched his beard, “But when you have grasped their meaning, I hope you will share their ancient story with me.”

“No problem.”

...

The three people slowly circled the room, carefully searching and touching everything with their hands, this way they quickly came to understand the general situation of this place.

They were unable to find any other stones, but on one side of the room they found a strange device – at first glance, it looked like a thick metal pipe. One end of which was embedded into the stone wall, while the other side constantly became narrower until it was only had the thickness of a wrist, and in its tip was a glass lens embedded.

“What is this?” Ashes knocked against its body, creating a series of clear echoes inside – indicating that the middle of the tube was hollow.

“It resembled a bit the observation mirrors we are using for sailing, maybe the people who previously lived here have used it to observe the outside world,” Then Thunder placed his eye in front of the lens, trying to look through it, but after a moment he said, “Everything is black... I can’t see anything; it seems to be broken.

“Not necessarily,” Tilly pointed at the wall behind the metal tube, “Look here.”

Following the direction of her finger, Ashes merely saw a copper plate with a handle on top of it embedded into the wall and at the bottom of the handle was a small hole, which seemed to be the place to insert a key. The 5th Prince walked over and tried to pull the handle, but the copper plate didn't move a single jot. “It seems to be locked.”

“I will try it,” Ashes grasped the handle, gathered her power and pulled, the entire copper plate immediately came off the wall.

“Ha, apparently you have guessed correctly,” Thunder applauded loudly, “It is once more a magic stone mechanism.”

Hidden behind the copper plate was a groove that was stuck within a huge magic stone. The difference between the two previous magic stones and this one was its size, it looked much larger, and its color also looked more purple than scarlet.

“Do you want to activate it?” Ashes asked.

“Yes,” Tilly nodded without the slightest hesitation, placing her hand on top of the stone, but this time even after a long moment, nothing seems to happen.

“What's the problem?”

“It’s... too big,” Tilly slowly said, small beads of sweat already began to appear on her forehead. “It feels like it is unceasingly absorbing my magic power. Apparently, the mechanism it has to fuel is utterly enormous.

“Then forget about it,” Ashes said with a frown. She knew the moment a witch had thoroughly exhausted her magic power; she will most likely immediately fall into a coma. And right now, in this dangerous place, it would definitely not be a good idea to deplete all of one’s magic power here.

“No, it will be fine. I can feel it.” Tilly’s voice had not even fallen, before a loud rumbling sound came from inside the wall that was like unceasingly rolls of thunder, and eventually the whole room began to shake.

“It this... an Earthquake?” Thunder grasped the metal pipe to keep himself from falling. Ashes instead immediately seized Lilly and pulled her into her embrace. The dust began to fall from the books, and the three people began to cough.

This kind of earthquake continued for nearly a quarter of an hour until finally calming down.

When the vibration stopped, Molly came up, stuck her head through the door and asked. “What happened?”

“We activated a new mechanism,” Ashes replied, “Is everything okay below?”

“Everyone was frightened, furthermore many roof plates began to fall, and I had to cover everyone with my servant.” The little girl answered while curiously coming over, “Tilly, what are you looking at?”

Surprisingly, Tilly didn't give her an answer, instead she had closed one eye and pressed the other in front of the lens, staying quiet for a long time until she exclaimed in amazement, “This simply incredible...”

Ashes becoming curious also stepped in front of the lens, and when the scene in front of her eye became clear, she was left speechless.

At the other end of the “observation mirror” a vast piece of land appeared. The edge of the land looked like an overhanging cliff of which the end couldn't be seen. But erected within the center of the cliff was a gigantic and incomparable arched stone door which internal seemed deep and dark, as if it was an enormous mouth which was choosing the next person it would be devouring.

Chapter 235 - A Letter Beyond Expectation

Roland opened the letter while simultaneously handing a piece of jerky over to Maggie.

“Googoo!” The latter opened her beak and grasped the meat with it and delivered it with two to three swallows into her belly. Then obediently placed her belly on the edge of the table, and embedding her head into her feathers.

“I hope this letter finds you well, my dear older brother, or should I say Your Royal Highness, Roland Wimbledon.

“I have received your letter, I agree with your opinion, and whole heartily approve of it. Even though I do not understand why you have suddenly changed your temper and corrected your previous dandy lifestyle. Even going so far as to be willing to help the witches, but now that you’ve done it, the Church has become our common enemy.

“Maybe you already know this, I have become a witch, this is also the reason why everyone is willing to believe me. However, you, in fact, are a Prince, a noble to the core, and yet you were also able to obtain the trust of numerous witches, it is indeed inconceivable. Ever since I received your message, I often wonder how you managed to do that? If you were simply like the other nobles, who regarded witches as tools and nothing more, then it would have been impossible for you to obtain Ashes’ approval, and she also never would have chosen to let Maggie stay in Border Town.

“Apart from this, Maggie also mentioned a steam engine, as well as the theory that knowledge could boost a witch’s possibility to evolve her magic, which also sounds fascinating to me. Especially the latter, which I would like to have the opportunity to discuss with you in detail.

“As for your invitation, after pondering it over and over again, at present, I have no reason to refuse it. The establishment of an alliance needs trust and gives trust in turn, and in the event that we act both indecisively and cowardly, we would only be helping the Church in the end. So I will attach a list to this letter which contains most of the abilities of the witches’ living on Sleeping Island, like this you can pick those abilities you need the most for yourself and inform me through Maggie about your decision. If everything goes well, they will be able to leave for your territory by next month. But for safety reasons, it is better to only send five at the first time.

“Furthermore, please specify a reliable transfer procedure, and send some people out in advance who will act to protect them. Each witch lost, regardless of whether she lives in Border Town or on Sleeping Island, would be great loss and also cast a shadow over our cooperation. I hope you will take care of them as well as you take care of your own witches. And if you will, please also allow them to participate in the evening basic knowledge lessons. I believe that every witch that is able to evolve her ability will be good news for us.

“As you have said, the Church has already shown their plan to backstab us, and it is only a matter of time until the Four Kingdoms will be annexed. I hope when that day comes, you will be ready to deal with them. But in case you will be unable to resist,

Sleeping Island will always act as a safe harbor for you. Of course, I will give you as much help as possible in your fight to repel the Church's invasion.

“Finally, may we end the Church's oppression and build a new order – a kingdom in which not merely witches, but rather no one has to suffer under groundless persecution.

“Your sister, Tilly Wimbledon.”

Putting the letter down, he felt an unspeakable pleasure coming from his heart. After he smilingly put the letter away, he took another piece of jerky and held it in front of Maggie.

Who immediately stretched out her head, to peck away the food.
“Goo, cuckoo!”

As he gently stroked the smooth feathers at her neck, she narrowed her eyes in satisfaction.

“It must have been tough on you, but currently Lightning has followed the fleet to King's City, and it will still be a few more days before she comes back,” Roland said with a smile. “However, you can go look for Nana or Leaves to play with, or go to the bathroom to take a bath, or just lie down and sleep.”

“Goo... goo!” Maggie spread out her wings, jumped off the table, and then flew out of the window, soon disappearing.

The cries she had just issued should mean something like ‘I’m not tired, I want to find them and play,’ Roland suddenly discovered, that now, even when she was speaking in her pigeon form he could still understand her general meaning.

Is this the power of habit?

Beside that, he also never imagined, that Tilly would actually agree to his invitation, furthermore even attach a list of their witch’s abilities, this was simply a big treasure house, ah! Although the letter never specified how long they would stay for, in case they wanted to attend the complete Primary Education Curriculum, they would at least need to spent half a year in Border Town. Furthermore, if he added additional content to the course, expanding the length to a full year, how much change could the witches bring to Border Town in that time?

Moreover, in case they were able to evolve, his benefits would be much greater than his losses – if they stayed in Border Town, they could help him improve this place further, but even if the witches went back to Sleeping Island, they would still be a living symbol of propaganda for him. With word of mouth to mouth publicity, the number of witches who would want to go to Border Town would only become more, and Tilly wouldn’t be able to prevent this development from occurring. Roland believes that compared with coercing them with promises or intimidation, waiting and showing sincerity was the right long-term strategy to use.

General speaking, this reply brought him a nice surprise far greater than anything he had expected. Her open and positive attitude made him feel like she was a perfect teammate sent by

destiny. This way, he no longer needed to fight the Church by himself. As for a safe shuttle route, Roland had been thinking about this for a long time – to avoid the Port of Clearwater and the Seawind Region; he had thought of directly crossing through the uninhabited land south of Border Town. After arriving at the mountains, he thought about taking a hot air balloon tour to cross the mountains, gaining direct access to the town's hinterland. That way, he would from the beginning to the end not have to pay any attention to the Church, Timothy or Garcia's forces.

The more Roland thought about it, the more excited he became. He suppressed his urge to immediately skim over the appendix and chose the witches and instead turned his attention to the present urgent matters that needed to be solved – after all, which kind of witches Sleeping Island sent was an issue for next month, but Border Town's currently most significant problem was the housing construction.

Since the First Army had sailed to King's City, an endless stream of refugees had arrived in Border Town. In order to prevent the disease from spreading, Roland had arranged an area west of the city wall all for them – there he had organised for long rows of wooden sheds to be built, providing a temporary place for the refugees to live in. Together with the serfs living on the other side of the Redwater River, their number already surpassed 8'000 people. In case the number of refugees will stay at the level of the last days, this number of people will most likely break through 10'000 in total.

Guaranteeing a supply of food for these people was not a problem. After all, since the end of the Months of Demons, Border Town had continuously imported food without interruption, but

the accommodation issue was clearly a big problem. During the summer, it was no problem to live in a wooden shed, and besides shielding them from the sun and rain, it also offered an excellent ventilation, even though their number of mosquito bites might be higher. But once winter arrived, there would nearly be no difference between living in the sheds and under open air, the temperature outside would be the temperature inside of the wooden shed. If he was unable to let them stay in brick houses, Roland was afraid that most of the people wouldn't survive past the long winter. In other words, Border Town had to build houses and dormitories for 10'000 people within the next six months.

Roland spread out a new piece of paper and picked up the pen.

He intended to take a part of the workers currently construction the Kingdom Avenue and put them to work building the houses. After all, it wasn't a big problem if the road construction got delayed by ten days or half a month, but if the people froze to death within his territory, it would leave a stain on his achievements. Even when he had only recently crossed over and had no money, and none of the nobles wanted to help him, he was still able to insure that not one person died during the Months of Demons because from hunger or cold. So, now with the Witch Union and the steam engine, as well as substantial income and workforce, he naturally couldn't allow such a situation to occur.

But at this moment, Carter suddenly walked into the office.

"Your Royal Highness, I have bad news," Carter said with a serious face, "The chemical laboratory just exploded."

Chapter 236 - Chemical Accident

Roland immediately rushed towards the laboratory next to the Redwater River. Arriving at the scene, Roland discovered that the damage wasn't as severe as he had imagined. At least the main building for refining acid completely lacked any damage, while the windows at the side building had shattered into pieces.

“My Lord, please save our teacher! He is so badly hurt, almost on the point of death.”

Seeing that Roland had appeared, the group of disciples immediately gathered around him but were soon stopped by his personal guards. Roland waved his hand, indicating that they don't need to be so anxious, “Where are the others? Let me have a look at them first.” Then he turned Carter and whispered, “Where's Nana?”

“I've already sent someone, so I estimate that she will be here soon.”

“Alright.”

Roland nodded and then entered the laboratory, under protection of his guards.

Kyle Sichi was lying on the ground, leaving a bloodstain on the ground, which extended from him to the side room, giving the general idea that the accident must have happened in the side room and that he had been dragged to the main room after. His

face was only an indistinct mass, with blood and other liquids mixed together, which should have been caused by the strong acid which had splashed on him during the explosion. He was also missing several fingers on his hands, and within the flesh he could see the white finger phalanges.

The apprentices had already provided him with emergency treatment, letting Roland see that they had also met similar situations in Redwater City. Dragging the people away from the danger, binding the wound to stop the bleeding, then seek help... these measures were all done quite well. However, receiving this kind of injury, and only having herbal medicine and the body's own healing ability as treatment, would lead to ten out of ten people dying.

Roland ordered his guards to wait at the door not letting anyone enter. Waiting for Nana's arrival, Carter and he went into the side room, trying to find the alchemist's fingers. Otherwise, even if the little girl healed his injuries, he would no longer be able to carry out his chemical experiments – which definitely would be a great loss for Border Town.

“It looks like a violent wind had swept through here,” Carter said and then pointed at his nose, “Furthermore, there is an unpleasant odor here.”

“That is the smell of nitrogen dioxide.” Roland carefully swept his eyes all over the room. Seeing that all the windows were open, he concluded that the possibility of poisoning wasn't large, at most, there were merely some leftover fumes which hadn't yet vanished. On the test stage, one bottle laid broken on the table, its

acid had flown over the table's surface, gathered on the floor and left behind a damp patch.

“Remember as you search through the tools, never to touch them directly with your hands,” the Prince reminded Carter. “There are gloves in the closet.”

Since Soraya's ability had evolved, he had also sent a dozen pairs of thin and anticorrosive gloves to the laboratory, but looking at the alchemist's horrible injuries, it was evident that he had been working on the test object without wearing them. In case he had worn the gloves, even if the explosion had blown his fingers away, at least his fingers would still be within the gloves.

When Roland looked through the closet above the test stand, something unusual attracted his attention. After he had taken the unusually formed bottle down and taken a closer look, he was convinced that it was actually the liquor he sold at the convenience market – and the amount left inside showed that a lot of it had already been drunk, leaving only half a bottle behind.

Kyle actually brought white liquor into the laboratory? It is hard to imagine that an experienced alchemist would be drinking during an experiment!

“Your Royal Highness, Miss Nana has arrived,” a guard reported.

“Good, continue to guard the door, don't let any of the apprentices enter,” leaving Carter behind, who continued to rummage through the chaos to find the fingers, Roland

immediately went back to the main room.

“Is it him?” For Nana, treating this sort of level of injury was already nothing out of the ordinary. The little girl who had previously been so scared of seeing blood and fainted whenever she encountered terrible wounds, had already grown up a lot — whether it was in regards to ability, or courage.

“First start with curing the corrosion wounds on his face,” Roland nodded. “Carter is currently looking for his missing fingers, when he finds them, you can connect them again later.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Nana responded proudly, “By now I’m already able to heal such small wounds.”

The startled Roland could only look on as she laid her hands on top of the Alchemist’s chest, closed her eyes, and Kyle’s injuries immediately began healing —his face was soon completely restored, and his disabled fingers unexpectedly began extending, healing at a slower rate. First, the bones regrew, followed by the flesh, and finally nails and hairs. About a quarter of an hour later, his fingers had been completely restored.

At this point, Carter also came back out of the side room, “Your Royal Highness, I was only able to find three of them, the last one might have already been destroyed during the explosion — eh?”

“Since when have you been able to do this?” Roland asked Nan in surprise when she opened her eyes again.

“Roughly a week ago, when the current chicken for my training lost a limb, I discovered that as long as I pour enough magic into it, I can slowly let it regrow.” She stuck out her tongue, “Probably because I recalled what you had said— that every part of the body is composed out of the same cells, which meant that the cutoff area was also only a loss of cells. Since my magic can make up for the damaged parts, why shouldn’t it also be able to make up for the lost parts? And then I tried to do it.”

“Are you able regrow every part?”

“The regrow takes a lot of effort,” Nana said, shaking her head. “Even though this method is very easy, and as long as it is only fingers, it is okay. But if it’s an arm or a leg, I cannot help it. After all, the amount of magic I can hold is far less than that of Sister Anna.”

That’s because you’re still a minor, Roland thought. Moreover, was this new capacity because of the evolution of her magic, or is it just the result of her training, leading to an increase of her magic capacity, allowing her to achieve an effect which had previously been impossible? Currently, Nightingale is not here to determine whether Nana’s magic source had given birth to changes or not. If this change is only because of an increase of her magic, the little girl’s performance after she reaches adulthood is something he looked forward to.

“Your Royal Highness, he woke up,” Carter interrupted.

“I was... what’s wrong?” Kyle frowned, first looked at his intact hands, then touched his face, “Shouldn’t I—”

“Should you have been killed during a chemical accident? Usually yes, but this witch saved your life. This person besides me had undertaken the task of rescuing and giving medical treatment to your people, Miss Nana Pine.” Roland decided to directly reveal Nana’s identity to the chief alchemist. A man who had rushed to Border Town because of an equation for a chemical reaction, shouldn’t be an incorrigibly or stubborn person, even if he thought of witches as disgusting in his heart, it would be unlikely that he would abandon his work and run over to the Church to report. And now since they had Lucia in town, it was only a matter of time until the alchemists and witches had to work together.

“For goodness sake! Do you mean that this witch can cure alchemy — no, the trauma caused by chemical experiments?” Roland hasn’t foreseen that Kyle’s reaction was totally contrary to what he had expected, “Hahaha, this is excellent, Your Royal Highness, this means that I can go through with experiments, without worrying about the dangers!”

“In the end, what happened?” Roland sighed in relieve. “Why did you bring the liquor into the laboratory?”

“No, Your Royal Highness, it is merely a test item,” the alchemist became entirely excited, “The thing I needed to produce for you, I did it!”

“Are you speaking of... Mercuric Acid?”

“That’s right, Your Highness! It turned out that the missing

reactant was alcohol!” He said in one breath, “Previously I had already tested dozens of raw materials, but I was unable to make any progress. Annoyed I went to the market and bought some liquor, but then I suddenly remembered that the “Elementary Chemistry” mentioned that alcohol is an organic solvent, which is necessary for some raw materials to react. I then distilled and purified the liquor and used it for a new reagent test, and finally, the sixth try was a success... Within several tubes, the gray crystal’s precipitation occurred, so I recorded all of their heating time and temperatures. Afterward, I extracted some of the crystal and tested them. The features they showed were the same as what you spoke of — the ash gray needle-shaped crystal powder is extremely sensitive and irritable. Just when I wanted to filter out the rest of crystals in the tubes, the test tube suddenly exploded.”

So, it is done like this, at this moment, Roland also suddenly remembered it, to get mercury fulminate it was necessary to add ethanol to the mercury to excess the nitric acid, or, perhaps it can be produced from the direct reaction of mercury nitrate and ethanol.

“Well done,” Roland said and patted Kyle’s Sichi’s shoulder. “This feat is enough for you to receive Border Town’s highest honor and rewards.”

Thus, with the cartridge problem fixed his centerfire ammunition finally took shape.

Chapter 237 - Invitation

After returning to his office, Roland immediately began to draw the blueprints for the new machines.

During the days, the First Army and witches had all gone to King's City, instead of doing nothing, Roland felt that he was busier than ever. Even without Nightingale around, Anna's and his time spent alone with one another was also very rare. Besides finding a place for the refugees to live that were coming with each ship, he also asked Anna and Lucia to test the composition of smelting products together, as well as constructing a new smelting furnace.

Before, no matter if it was smelting iron or making steel, it had purely been done by experience and feeling, never knowing what the result would be after the refining. But now with Lucia's help, Roland finally had a precise method for determining the composition of the ingots. With the aid from the material decomposition ability, he could finally obtain the necessary detailed data for smelting metal after repeated comparisons between results. For example, the post-melting stirring time, the exact amount of charcoal added, and whether to add limestone or other additives to remove sulfur and phosphorus, or which other metals and raw materials had to be added to get alloy and so forth...

Based on these data, Roland could summarize a standard process for the smelting industry, which would guarantee the continuous production of iron ingots and steel that had the same quality each time. This would also disperse the dense fog hovering over the material science and engineering field.

The new smelting furnace had also been built for this reason.

It was a square furnace with a length and width of four meters, and a height of two meters, with the bottom tilted towards one end. It's thick outer shell was made of pig iron, while the internal layer consisted of clay bricks as well as Soraya's "earth" coating, which all guaranteed excellent heat resistance. The lower end was provided with a movable gate, which was driven by a steam engine. Considering that those high-end heating methods, such as oxygen, electric arc and so on haven't reached the implementation stage yet, the furnace simply didn't have any combustion systems installed – And depended entirely on Anna's black fire for smelting molten steel. After adding the right amount of raw materials and to smelt the metal in accordance with the finished test, the molten steel was directly discharged from the tailgate.

The furnace could produce 50 ton of steel at once, and with it, Anna would only need a short half hour to complete the smelting. Together with the feeding and tapping time, it would take around one hour to complete, its output could then meet the current need for firearms and artillery production. Nowadays the town's smelting plan was that the group of blast furnaces and shaft furnace were responsible for producing a great amount of pig iron, which was not only be used in the manufacturing of the daily use ironware and steam engines but could also be used as the raw material for further smelting, for example wrought iron or steel.

...

The blueprints Roland was currently drawing, was the set of

production equipment used for bullet stamping – with a stable and reliable source of steel, processing and assembling a stamping machine would no longer be hindered by material problems. So, when the trial production of the mercury fulminate succeeded, they could immediately start with mass production of the new bullets. Even though cutting with Anna's black fire was efficient and accurate, but even in the case where a person could complete the whole process, they would still need to spend a long time doing so. However, in the event that a line of stamping machines was put into production, after learning how to operate them, more than 30 ordinary people could at least produce ten thousand bullets per day. Furthermore, the soldiers would also no longer need to manually reload their ammunition.

Even after dinner, he was still busy drawing, only when the sound of the midnight bell came through the window could his set of sketches be considered complete. Of course, this was merely the most initial plan of his concept, he still didn't know if some of the details was feasible, and because of this it needed to be tested before he could finalize his plan.

If it were like usual, Roland would have already yawned again and again, but today he was in high spirits, not feeling even a little sleepy at all.

After putting the more than ten recently drawn draft papers away, Roland took the attached parchment to the 5th Princess letter out of the drawer, spread it over the table, and finally came to the long awaited task – the selection of the visiting witches.

The list held more than 60 auxiliary witches and their abilities,

but from Maggie's mouth, Roland had heard that Sleeping Island sheltered between two hundred to three hundred people, which made it obviously that Tilly had not put all of the auxiliary witches on the list at his table. This was also in line with the way a leader should behave — taking the initiative to reach out her hand in friendship, rather than holding on to family bonds. In this way, the opposite party had already expressed enough of their sincerity in wishing to form an alliance. Then Roland put up a new candle and concentrate on going over the witch abilities on the appendix.

He soon had to acknowledge, that this was a tough decision to make, but after a going through the list many times and comparing them from all sides, he finally chose the name of his five visitors.

Roland then spread out a new piece of parchment and began to write his reply.

“My dear sister, I am very glad to have received your letter.

“I am excited and pleased with your decision, with your assistance, I now have a bigger chance of blocking the Church's assault.

“The reason I could obtain the witches' trust and support, is because of this: within the entire Kingdom of Graycastle, only Border Town has completely erased the influence of the Church. Not only do the natives accept the witches, they even fight together, side by side. Beginning from the battle against the demonic beasts upto the confrontation with the Church, my people and witches have come to form an inseparable whole. Nowadays, the figures of witches can be seen everywhere within the town

participating in the construction. The steam engine that makes you wonder was also only possible to achieve due to the help of a witch. All this is already a good start, and all I have to do is to extend this situation to the whole of the Western Territory, until it spreads through the entire kingdom.

“Therefore, I have to destroy the entire Church, and turn their statement that the witches are the Devil’s messenger into dust. However, rescuing all the people from their ignorance and stupidity will be a long and slow process, for which I will need even more help from you.

“Concerning, what would lead to this decision, what caused me to no longer so indifferent to everything as I was in the past, are trivialities that can slowly be elaborated on when we have the time, but the ability to express oneself in a letter is limited, so I won’t say more than is necessary.

“Concerning the witches’ visit next month, I’m very much looking forward to it. There is no reason to be anxious about their safety, I have already planned a direct route to Border Town for them, which will also allow you to avoid the eyes and ears of the Church completely and which doesn’t need the support of a harbor. The only risk will be the navigation, however, if you let Maggie fly in front of you to show you the way, there will be only be a tiny possibility losing your way. I will attach a map with the specific route to Maggie when I send her to Sleeping Island.

“When these witches arrive at Border Town, they will naturally be able to participate in the lessons of Basic Knowledge – the so-called knowledge which boosts the evolution of the witch’s ability.

However, I am more inclined to the idea that it actually a deeper understanding of the world itself that leads to their transformation, whether it was regarding nature, magic, not excluding the understanding of their own person. I have not the least doubt that our odds of winning in a fight against the Church increases with every witch able to evolve her ability, on this point your opinion and mine are completely in line.

“Finally, I will now list the five selected witches and I hope to see them as soon as possible.

“Land Shaper – Lotus.

“State Preserver – Candle.

“Winemaker – Evelyn.

“Beast Tamer – Honey.

“As well as Eye of Truth – Sylvie.

“I wish you all the best. Your brother, Roland Wimbledon.”

Chapter 238 - How Could I Possibly Regret This?

A week later, the expedition of the First Army and witches finally returned to Border Town. From the date of their departure until their return, the mission had almost lasted half a month, five days longer than expected.

The main reason for the delay was that on the day the fleet had set out on the way home, Longsong Stronghold Acting Duke Petrov's messenger arrived in Border Town, reporting the outbreak of an unknown plague in the stronghold.

Due to Roland's previous warning, the moment when Petrov became aware of the disease, he took measures to isolate the patients as well as possible, and completely closed down the city, then immediately send a messenger over to Border Town.

After receiving the report of an outbreak, Roland sent Maggie out, and had her fly with great speed eastwards along the Redwater River, looking for the fleet carrying the First Army, to give them the order to change their route and take the fork to Longsong Stronghold. Later, after the eradication of the demonic plague, once more set out to return home.

On the day of their return, Roland led all the other members of the First Army and the families of the expedition members to the docks to celebrate their smooth return. Accompanied by the sound of the familiar army march, the soldiers excitedly saluted the Prince, while many other people imitated the knighting ceremony and went down on one knee to loudly shout out 'Long live His

Highness'. After they had walked down the pier, they fell into the arms of their loved ones and tightly hugged them, accentuated by Echo's timely gun salute. The atmosphere of the scene became so lively that it attracted the refugees and the serfs to soon come join them.

Back in the castle, Iron Axe gave a full report on the mission.

"You mean to say, that the enemy attacking the First Army had a witch within their ranks?" After thinking about it for a moment, Roland continued. "It's unlikely that she was part of the street rats."

"Theo thinks the same thing; he even believes that the rats belong to an other force. Otherwise, those scum would almost never leave their nest and try to operate outside of it. The only forces in King's city that can control the rats and could also possess a witch are the Church and King Timothy." Iron Axe said, "Even those other powerful nobles would be unable to force the largest street rats organization to move at full strength, and leave their nest vulnerable."

"But Timothy is actually in the Eastern Region, and I don't believe that he is daring enough to send a witch out to fight alone, I think that the Church is more suspect." Thinking of Wendy and Ashes' encounters with the Church, it wasn't surprisingly to Roland that the Church had trained a group of witches in secret. "Are you sure she's dead?"

"Nightingale's shot hit her in the chest, breaking her thoracic cavity into pieces," Iron Axe said while nodding, "we buried her in

the wheat field, at the place where we found the remains of our sentry.”

At the end of their last day, their team of three hundred people had met an attack of a vast number of rats with the final result of one dead and four injured. The only victim was the soldier who died by the hands of the witch, the other four injured had been hit by lucky crossbow shots from the approaching rats. With their revolver rifles greater firepower, the fight was already over before it even came to the melee combat phase. The wounded soldiers had immediately been properly bandaged and sent back to Border Town to be treated by Nana – it was due to the presence of Lily that their injuries showed almost no sign of infection. As long as the crossbow arrows did not hit vital organs and they were able to stop the bleeding soon enough, the chance for the injured to survive was very good.

In general, seeing the First Army acquiring this kind of result during their second expedition, made Roland feel very satisfied. As for how to hinder the enemy from successful attacking the sentries, Roland knew very little about that. The only thing he did know was that they needed to set up the posts so that they could always monitor one another, but how to do it exactly, was a task better left to Iron Axe to handle.

“You have worked hard; I will hold a ceremony at the central square of the town, tomorrow. You should go and notify all members of the First Army about it.”

When Iron Axe finally retired, Roland let out a long breath.

“Well done,” with this words, Roland took a bag of grilled fish from the drawer and put it on the table. “If it hasn’t been for you, I’m afraid they would have been in great danger.”

At his words, Nightingale’s figure appeared at his side and with a smile accepted the dried fish. “Like I said before, I had everything under my control.”

“How was the strength of the other side?”

“She was very agile and acted very determined; I think she should have been in training for several years. If it wasn’t for her trying to resist at the same time as I entered my fog, I can’t say for sure if I would have been able to avoid being hit by her fine powder.” Nightingale just shrugged it off and tried to seem casual during her report of the following events, but he still became aware of her discomfort when she told about the shooting. “but, when I saw the look in her eyes when she stabbed at Wendy, I came to an understanding, that with the exception of death there was nothing that would stop her.”

“...” For a moment Roland was silent. “Do you still remember what you said to me on the way back after the defeat of Timothy’s militia?”

Nightingale thought back, ” ‘This is not your fault’ ?”

“That’s it,” he nodded. “If she were a witch who was raised by the Church from early on, she would always treat you as a traitor, a fallen, even after a few years of coexistence, it would still be

tough to cure her of that way of thinking... At least with her death, you were able to save Wendy's life."

Nightingale began to laugh "Are you trying to comfort me?"

"Ke..." Roland coughed twice, "Those were my real thoughts."

"Feel relieved, I won't feel sad for the enemy, although she was a witch, the path she chose was entirely different from the one I desire to see in the future, this is the same I already said aboard during the journey back." Nightingale picked up a piece of dried fish and put it into her mouth, "I just knocked the enemy down while protecting my sisters, I only fulfilled my duty, nothing more."

"It is good if you can think like that," Roland said happily. It seems that he had still underestimated her, with his thought that she would feel lost and confused after personally killing another witch, never expecting that she would be able to adjust to it in just a short time. It appears that in both mind and belief, Nightingale was coming close to reaching maturity.

She swallowed the fish, hesitated for a moment and then opened her mouth to say: "But there is one little thing I want to ask you."

"What?"

"What were you and Anna doing during these days?" Even though Nightingale's voice became lower and lower, her eyes kept

their focus on the Prince, "...you know what I'm talking about."

Roland almost knocked the cup over in his hands, "Keke, asking this so suddenly, what do you... during these days I have been occupied with finding a place to settle the refugees, there wasn't much chance to be alone with her."

Immediately her eyes began to lit up. "That wasn't a lie."

"Of course not, I was –"

Before another word could escape Roland's lips, Nightingale suddenly vanished into thin air, immediately following which he felt a pair of soft lips on his mouth, after a fleeting touch only leaving behind the light flavor of salty fish. It took him a long while until he realized what had just happened.

"Wait –"

Once more he couldn't finish what he wanted to say. This time, two slender fingers sealed his mouth, even though he couldn't see her, but he knew that Nightingale was still standing at his side.

"I know what you want to say..." she whispered next to his ear, "I do not want to change anything, I don't intend to put myself between you and Anna, I merely hope to be always stay by your side, that's all. Forgive me for not daring to show my figure to you, because right now, I also don't know what kind of expression I should show when facing you. Your Highness, you don't dislike

me?”

“...” Roland opened his mouth, but it seemed that saying he disliked Nightingale was impossible. The barrier that kept him from accepting her was not something about like and dislike, but rather ethical, shaped by twenty years of social experience before coming to this world, by now, he could no longer deceive himself.

“That being the case,” she whispered, “do not say anything. It’s not your fault; I only did what I wanted to after all.”

Chapter 239 - Midnight Snack

After eating dinner, Anna carried a large batch of Bird Beak Mushrooms into the kitchen.

At her request, Maggie had collected these spotlessly white mushrooms in the Concealing Forest – they were different from common mushrooms, the Bird Beak Mushrooms commonly grows on top of huge trees, it survives by absorbing the nutrients from the trees, but it was also the favorite food of some birds species. Although it had a very delicious taste, and its fleshy umbrella shaft was as delicate as exquisite meat, with its relatively high growing place which made it hard to discover just by standing on the ground, there weren't many people willing to climb the trees to pick these mushrooms.

Her mother would always gather some for her birthday, sometimes picking more and sometimes less, but always enough to make two mushroom dishes to celebrate her birthday. Compared to the usual moldy and coarse bread and bland porridge, its unique flavor was hard to forget. Although nowadays, she has no longer had to worry about not getting enough food to fill her belly, these days the food was always varied and plentiful, she still wanted to personally make this delicious food which could only be tasted in this small town in the western region and share it with Roland Wimbledon who was recently always so busy.

The flames in kitchen stove had already been extinguished, but to Anna, this didn't pose any problem. She took some firewood from the side and threw it into the oven, and called her black flame, just a few moments later a vigorous fire already burned within its chamber.

At this time, Nightingale suddenly appeared from the wall, “Hey, what are you doing?”

“I want to make something to eat for His Highness, these days he is always staying up late to work. What about you?”

“Ahaha,” Nightingale began laughing in embarrassing, and touched the back of her head with her hand. “I just came to look for a snack to eat... I’m a little hungry.” After pausing for a moment, she curiously probed, “What are you planning to cook?”

.“Well... honey baked mushrooms and mushroom soup,” Anna opened the bundle, revealing the Bird Beak Mushrooms inside, “They are Border Town’s regional specialty, do you want to try some?”

Nightingale nodded and then quickly asked, “Can you teach me how to make them?... I also wish to learn to cook them.”

“Yes,” Anna laughed, “It’s quite easy.”

After slicing the mushrooms, she took a lot of the mushrooms and divided them between Nightingale and herself. “First spread a layer of butter on both sides of the mushrooms, then carefully roast them on the fire until they are golden on all sides. Be careful not to roast them for too long, or else they will burn black.”

“Okay,” Nightingale said then took a piece of the Bird Beak

Mushrooms and imitated Anna's style of smearing oil on both sides of the mushroom. "Has His Highness recently always worked until late into the night?"

"That's right, in order to find a place for the refugees, as well as drawing blueprints for new machines, he spends almost everyday after midnight before he goes to bed. There were several times when I've passed by his office, that I could still see the light of the burning candles from under the door." Anna nodded once and then asked, "You were gone for more than half a month, so you began to miss His Highness, right?"

Hearing the unexpected question, Nightingales hand slightly trembled, dropping the mushroom into the oil, "Uh... actually it was not too bad..."

"It wasn't limited to only you; it was also the same for Lightning, Lily, Echo, and Wendy. They all were missing His Royal Highness; they said since there was not even a bathing place, they had all wanted to return at an earlier time," Anna suddenly felt that the other's expression had become somewhat strange, "Hey, what happened?"

"Nothing," Nightingale said flustered, shook her head, took another mushroom and then said with an embarrassed smile, "actually it was like that, indeed... I also longed to come back."

"Is that so?" Anna used her hands to directly pinch the oil coated mushrooms and threw them into the fire of the stove, "If it was me who have to leave His Highness for half a month, no, maybe even just a few days would already be enough that I couldn't wait to see

him again.”

The moment when she had met Roland Wimbledon within the dungeon, was the most incredible moment in her entire life, until today whenever she recalled this moment, her heart would still fill with warmth and gratitude. If not for His Highness, even if she could have somehow lived on, it would only be a life in ignorance and confusion, just like those apathetic townsfolk.

It was His Highness who had taught her how beautiful the world truly was. No matter if it was because of the soy paste covered pepper steaks, or the “Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science”, the moment he had stepped into her life it had been filled with all kinds of new things, allowing her to finally feel that she no longer was the same as those other people, but rather a unique and unmatched witch.

She was confident that the others sisters also felt the same – as long as they were in contact with His Highness for a long enough, it was impossible for them not to become caught up in his strange but clever ideas and his unique charm, this was what Anna believed without a shred of doubt.

“Oh, did I bake this for too long?” Nightingale raised her iron fork and showed that one side of the mushroom had already become burned.

“A little bit...” Anna couldn’t suppress her laugh, “Bird Beak Mushrooms is very tender, so it isn’t necessary to roast them for a long time, just test it some more and you will grasp it. For now, I will prepare the material for the stew. ”

Nightingale instead sprinkled the lightly burned mushroom with honey and salt and threw it into her mouth, “Well it’s still delicious.” Seeing how Anna skillfully mixed all kinds of herbs and other ingredients together, she asked curiously, “Have you done this often before?”

“Ah, marinating food, grinding flour, going to the nobles and ask for a seasonal work, helping to wash and shave the neighbor’s sheep,” Anna said, “Most of the time I was doing those kinds of odd jobs, the only exception was when I went to Teacher Karl’s college.” After pausing for a moment, she continued, “But when my mother had died, my father no longer let me go to the college, or even allowed me to leave the house in general.”

“Sorry...”

“All of that doesn’t matter any longer, it’s in the past now,” Anna’s eyes shined brightly like a sky-blue lake in the moonlight. “Compared with the majority of the other witches, I can already be considered as being very lucky, can’t I?”

Over the flame the thin pieces of in butter coated mushrooms slightly curled up, issuing a crackling sound. After sprinkling some salt grains on top of the mushrooms and roasting them until golden on both side, a fresh and fragrant smell soon began entering their nostrils. The mix out of the milky flavor of the heated butter and the unique flavor of the Bird Beak Mushrooms caused them to salivating. And with their final honey coating, the roasted mushrooms were finally ready. Whether it was the Bird Beak Mushrooms or the honey, both could be collected in the

Concealing Forest, but even for the locals, if it turned out that there was a beehive on a cut-down tree, or Bird Beak Mushrooms at its top, it was considered a very lucky day.

When the pot with the stew release white steam, the two also completed their mushroom roasting and seasoning.

“That was a success, or at least it looks good,” Nightingale said, stuffing another piece into her mouth. “As it turns out I also have quite a gift for cooking... Pff! It seems this piece was a bit salty.”

“The time is also just right,” Anna stated after glancing at the night outside of the window, “I presume we should deliver it to His Highness now.”

“Would you please hand mine over to him?” Nightingale asked, clapping her hands together, “Please.”

“Don’t you want to come with me?”

“I can’t,” she laughed. “Because I do not know what kind of expression I should show when I see him now.”

Anna was startled by the unexpected answer, but before she even could open her mouth to further ask about meaning of this sentence, the other had already disappeared into thin air.

Is it important what kind of expression I show? Regardless if I show a smile, am dispirited or wear an expressionless face they are

all good, ah. Even when I had just come out of prison, had lost faith in everything, and had all my hope turned to dust, His Highness never became fed up with my, so why does she want to avoid him?

Even after thinking about it for a time, it still felt incomprehensible to her. So, in the end, she only shook her head, picked up the tray with the mushrooms and the soup by herself and went to the office.

Chapter 240 - Award And Honor Ceremony

Roland was currently designing the pattern of the medal for tomorrow's ceremony. It was reasonable to say that he should already have completed this not especially complicated work long ago, but since the beginning of the afternoon, he had felt somewhat ill at ease.

That's right; it was because of Nightingale's kiss.

Although there had been some indistinct signs before, since she had never acted on it, he had also never taken the initiative to speak about it either. But now, there was no longer any room for doubt, what would be the right way to respond to her feelings?

This question also let him understand that he didn't dislike Nightingale at all. Instead, he even somewhat liked her. A beautiful and touching woman with a calm nature, and with whom he was together from morning to night, how could he ever hate her? The reason for Roland's inability to respond positively towards her laid in the twenty years of ideology he had inherited, as well as the actual question he would have to face in the future... Anna's opinion. Especially the later point, he couldn't ignore Anna, and only act according to his own preferences.

Perhaps only time could bring him the answer he was looking for.

Suddenly, a knocking sound came over from the other side of the door.

“Come in; it isn’t locked,” Roland shouted while being surprised at the same time, who would still come to his office at this hour?

Only to see that it was actually Anna who pushed the door open and entered the room, holding a tray with two dishes and an earthenware jar. Before she could even open her mouth to speak, Roland could already smell an alluring aroma.

“Food?”

“Yes,” Anna let out a small laugh and placed the tray on the table, then removed the top of the jar and uncovered a milky white soup, “This dish is called honey roasted mushrooms, this plate here was made by me and Nightingale made the other one. And in the jar is mushroom soup, it is seasoned with some commonly seen herbs.”

“It looks very delicious,” Roland licked his lips, “Come sit down so that we can eat together.”

Anna nodded and sat at the opposite side of the table.

“Why didn’t Nightingale come along?”

“She said... she didn’t know what kind of expression she should show when she sees you,” Anna replied. “I do not quite understand why she cares.”

“...” So that’s the reason, Roland softly sighed within his heart, although she had so boldly and confidently said that she didn’t felt the least bit of regret, even shamelessly boasted “This is not your fault, I just did what I wanted to”. However, in truth her ability to summon her courage and leave the cave to explore the outside world wasn’t any better than that of a squirrel. Really, in the end, was she daring or timid... “In that case, let’s eat first.”

When he picked up a piece of mushroom and put it into his mouth, the honey melted and within a flash spread its sweetness within his mouth, soon followed by the mushrooms own juice. In the absence of monosodium glutamate, it was still so rich and tasty that it made him completely speechless... a little salt further enhanced its freshness, and also, the mushroom’s own chewy texture, of exquisite tenderness, the taste became simply impeccable.

“These... aren’t ordinary mushrooms right?” after swallowing, Roland immediately asked about the aspect of the meal that let it stand out from the masses of other foods. In general, it was already good when the mushrooms could keep their fresh taste when barbecued, but how could they be this juicy? As if they were filled with soup.

“Well, they are a specialty of the Concealing Forest, the town’s people call them Bird Beak Mushrooms,” Anna smiled and recounted the mushroom’s history, “That’s why I wanted you to taste them.”

Afterward, Roland also tasted the slowly cooked mushroom soup, which was equivalently matchless, the flavor of the juices was even

more rich, it was just like eating tangbao in general, furthermore, with every chew a crisp feeling was invoked. Tasting this for a long time he couldn't help but think of the in later generation extremely commonly used, seasoning which was added in vast amounts to all kind of dishes – MSG. In the time before MSG had appeared, chefs could only enhance the flavor of food indirectly, for example by using whole chicken bones, mushrooms and soybeans to create a clear soup stock. Although the preceding generations of cooks preferred once more the authentic flavor to show off their own exquisite culinary talent. However, it was still right to say that even if it was a bad or novice chef, as long as they added MSG, they could increase the dull flavor of their food by more than a level.

Supposing that the Bird Beak Mushrooms was naturally so rich and juicy in flavor, they would be the perfect material for extract MSG. They were just growing on top of the trees, making them hard to pick and thus weren't widespread? For Roland, something like this wasn't a problem at all.

“This type of mushrooms, do you know how many of them are there?”

“I am not sure... but I presume there should be a lot of them,” Anna said, taking another small bite. “Maggie said that she only circled along the edge of the forest, but she was still able to help me pick a huge bag full of them.”

“That is great to hear,” Roland already cleanly finished all the mushrooms Anna had roasted. Thus he stretched out his chopsticks to the second plate, “I was worried that there was

nothing besides meat dipped in honey or pepper here, I was almost getting tired of eating – pff.”

“What’s wrong?”

“No-nothing.” His heart burst into tears, for goodness sake, this piece is salted too much, did Nightingale accidentally drop it into the salt jar? Even though this were his thoughts, he still swallowed the mushroom. Afterward, Roland discovered that other mushroom pieces weren’t completely pasted or cooked, there were also other which were scorched on one side while the other side was left uncooked. Fortunately, the Bird Beak Mushroom were delicious in itself, in this way it covered up her bad cooking to a large degree.

“I... ate my fill,” Roland said putting his chopsticks down, with great difficulty he had finished eating the second plate, and then he even had drunk the complete soup, until his belly already began to bulge up. “Thank you.”

“Thanks, but there was also Nightingale,” Anna said with a laugh, letting her look so incredibly adorable, that Roland couldn’t help but reach out and pinch her nose. The latter whimpered a small cry and then kissed the prince’s cheek. “Then I’ll now go and wash the dishes, don’t forget to go to bed early.”

After the witch had left, Roland lightly sighed.

Although I don’t want to ignore Anna’s thoughts... but there are some matters which aren’t easy to speak about. He helplessly thought, probably this has also something to do with my former

identity as a mechanical dog, after all, during my entire academic period, I rarely had any dealings with the opposite sex. And even after graduating and successfully entering a large-scale planning institute, and having a considerable salary, my situation still hadn't changed much.

Luckily, there is still a long way to go before the Church is completely destroyed, so I have enough time to slowly consider what I need to do next. As for now, it is better to concentrate on completing the work in front of me.

...

On the next morning, Roland stepped onto a temporary erected wooden platform in the town's square, which was surrounded by a sea of people.

Comparing the current Border Town with the former impoverished and desolated town, it seemed as heaven and earth had been turned upside down, saying that it looked completely new wouldn't be an exaggeration.

The town's sparse old houses had been completely torn down. Instead they had been replaced by construction sites and the already finished brick houses scattered all over the place. Furthermore, the latter were constructed in accordance with the development plan of the whole district, giving it a neat and tidy appearance – although they only occupied one-third of the former town's land, they still offered enough space to accommodate the original two thousand indigenous citizens.

By the time they began building three or four layered houses, as well as opening the follow-up district, the number of people living on the same piece of land would only become more and more. By now still calling it Border Town was no longer consistent with the actual situation, no town had a population of nearly twenty thousand people and a professional army of about six hundred people. However, Roland intended to wait until spring next year before officially promoting Border Town to a real city.

With the support of Echo's ability, Roland's voice quickly quieted the crowd down.

“Today, is the day of Border Town's award and honor ceremony, we will use this time to reward and encourage those people who had made a major contribution to all of us. More than half a year has passed since I have arrived here, since then we have defeated the demonic beasts, beat the Duke, and given this town its current appearance. To achieve all this, many people had to sacrifice a lot, among these, there are several outstanding people, they are not nobles, nor are they wealthy merchants, before they served me they were merely ordinary folk, just like you are!

He let his view wander over the people, and then loudly exclaimed, “But now they will be rewarded handsomely! Including a medal personally crafted by me, one hundred gold royals, and five acres of land!”

This news immediately stirred up the masses, sending waves of cheers through the crowd, not to mention the medal and the land, just the one hundred gold royals, was a sum to cause envy in the

others.

“This isn’t a one-time ceremony – from now on we will hold this kind of ceremony each year, regardless of your birth, irrespective of your wealth, as long as you have achieved extraordinary merits you can all obtain this highest of honors!”

The moment Roland’s voice fell, Echo’s imitation of a gun salute suddenly resounded through the whole audience, and within the unceasing explosion, Iron Axe, Kyle Sichi, and Nana Pine arrived, escorted by the First Army, and entered the wooden stage.

Chapter 241 - Liberation

At the moment, there were undoubtedly 2000 or more people gathered in the public square, yet their excitement didn't differ much to that of a large gatherings of more than 10'000 people of the later eras. Roland inwardly sighed, Echo's ability was indeed extremely handy.

The reason why he had chosen these three people was mainly in order to set an example for the masses – of the three of them not one was a noble, Iron Axe belonged to the Sandpeople, and originated from the other side of the Southern Border; even though Kyle was an alchemist, he had been born in a common family and reached his rank after starting as an apprentice and climbing up the ladder step by step; while Nana, was a witch.

They were an alien, a civilian, and a witch; putting it in a way that modern civilization would have, this choice had been inspired by an impeccable sense of 'political correctness'.

Roland hoped that through this ceremony he would be able to impart his concept to all of his people – Border Town only focuses on your merits, it doesn't pay any attention to where you might have come from.

The first person to come forward and receive his medal was Iron Axe, Roland had personally engraved the gold medal with an insignia of Graycastle's tower surrounded by wheat ears and with an edge of pinions. The moment Iron Axe took the medal, the members of the First Army in the audience, raised their hands in applause and many other people began whistling.

“His name should already be known to all of you, Commander of the First Army’s Firearm Team, Iron Axe!” Roland turned to face everyone, “Before the arrival of the Months of Demons, he was just one of the many hunters in the town. But whenever there was a fight endangering Border Town, Iron Axe would never be absent, and in the previous month, he has also led the First Army soldiers to King’s City, saving those refugees besieged by the demonic plague from the Eastern Region! The recent 6000 people temporarily living outside of the city wall had all been brought back by him!”

Most people on the square were either Border Town’s natives or member of the First Army, while the number of serfs and refugees only accounted for a few hundred people, but under Echo’s sound transmission, the mood of the crowd didn’t become awkwardly silent. The moment Roland paused his speech, the fugitives at the scene all immediately began cheering loudly, their intensity not any weaker compared to the First Army’s.

Iron Axe also appeared to be very excited, most probably, with his identity as a member of the Mojin Clan living in another kingdom he would never have thought that he would ever obtain the Prince’s favor. He first presented Roland with the First Army’s military salute and then went down on one knee in Graycastle’s knight ceremony. In case Roland hadn’t stopped him with his hand, he would most likely also have gone through with the ceremony of the Sandpeople.

“Get up, as a soldier, just using a military salute is already enough,” Roland laughingly stated.

“Thank you... Your Highness,” he answered with a slightly trembling voice as if he was making supreme effort to suppress his emotions.

The Prince patted Iron Axe’s shoulder in a consoling manner, placed a bag with 100 gold royals into his hand then signalled Kyle Sichi to come over.

“This one, you may be seeing for the first time, he came to Border Town from the kingdom’s Central Region, the former chief alchemist of Redwater City’s Alchemic Workshop, Mr. Kyle Sichi!”

Hearing his words, let the people exclaim in wonder.

“A chief Alchemist? Aren’t they people who even the king has to treat with respect and courtesy?”

“You mean just like royal astrologers?”

“No, the position of an alchemist is even higher than that of an astrologer, after all, no one can guarantee that the latter’s prophecy will become true, while the alchemist at least does something that is tangible.”

“Furthermore, he even came from Redwater City’s Alchemic Workshop; I heard that only the Alchemic Workshop in King’s City is comparable to it!”

“ ... ”

In the Four Kingdoms, alchemists and astrologer all had a lofty status, and within the ranks of the civilian population they were also called sages, and were the only people worthy of lecturing the powerful nobles and lords. When he saw the reaction of the crowd, Roland was very satisfied, he stretched his hand out to calm the crowd then said: “Even though Mr. Sichi didn’t personally participate in the battles, but with the continuous improvement of the firearms, from single shot to salvo, it would never have been possible without his chemical laboratory, which was also an important factor in guaranteeing the First Army’s victories. Without these alchemical and chemical products, Border Town would not be able to win and obtain true peace.”

After taking a short pause, the Prince then continued, “Incidentally, the chemical laboratory is currently enrolling trainee alchemist, they will accept people who have completed the Primary Education course and also went through Border Town’s citizen inspection. After being accepted, you won’t only receive a generous salary, but you will also receive the chance to become an outstanding Master Alchemist just like Mr. Sichi!”

The moment his voice fell, the masses once more began to loudly clamor, yet Sichi himself wore a face covered in impatience, when he took the medal he ill-humoredly said, “You called me over for a matter such as this? This was indeed a waste of time; I might just as well have done a few more experiments instead.”

“This is a great opportunity for publicity, didn’t you complain that you were short-handed,” Roland shrugged his shoulders, “By

the time when the number of apprentices are doubled, I intend on writing the book on ‘Advanced Chemistry’ and teaching it to you.”

“Advanced... Chemistry?” Hearing this, Sichi immediately bowed, “Thank you a lot, Your Highness!”

Although it was quite important to focus on one matter, fostering a successor was equally important and also demanded immediate action. And the wider the foundation, the easier it would be to achieve results, the same as was true for scientific research. Roland never planned to put all of his eggs in one basket, so whenever there was a perfect advertising opportunity like this, he certainly wouldn’t just let it go.

The final one was Nana.

The girl seemed a bit nervous as she came to his side, Roland couldn’t help but sigh in sorrow.

Compared with the time during the Months of Demons, when he didn’t wish others to see them, today, he finally intended to announce the witches presence to everyone – after nearly six months of preparation, Border Town has now reached the perfect moment to welcome them. Furthermore, choosing Nana as their representative was also the result of careful deliberations. All the soldiers of the First Army called her an angel, and within their ranks she even held an higher rank than Iron Axe, second only to his own reputation. While there were also many town residents who had already received her treatment. No matter if it were mine accidents or injuries caused by machines, the injured had already developed the habit of looking for their angel for treatment.

After watching the drama “Witch Story” several times, the attitude of the serfs had already changed and they were no longer against them. Seeing the tragic fate of the witches but also that they were always brave enough to make a stand and fight in the dramas, created an image of witches which was capable of winning a lot of people’s sympathy and goodwill.

The same could also be said about the refugees who could only survive because of Lily’s ability. Even if there were people who loathed the witches in their heart, after being rescued by them they couldn’t any longer slander them with malicious talk. Even more now after they hadn’t received help from the Church in their most vulnerable state – at least in Border Town, these woman with their extraordinary abilities would be protected by the Lord.

However, the most crucial point was, even if there were Church followers who wanted to expose them, it would be difficult for them to set off any wind and waves here in the Western Region. Border Town was completely under his rule, and the Church in Longsong Stronghold had been completely destroyed, in that way they lost the possibility of monitoring the Western Region. Only if they went to the cities further away, like Fallen Dragon Ridge or Redwater City, would they be able to find any of the Church’s priests.

“This is -” Roland did not even have the time to finish his introduction, before the square burst into thunderous cheers.

“Miss Nana, Miss Nana, the young lady has come!”

“Young Angel, thank you for curing my husband!”

“Little girl, when you have time come to my house and eat. I specifically raised two chickens, whether steamed egg soup or stewed chicken soup they are all possible!”

“Nana looked at me!”

“No, she looked at me!”

Nana could not help to cover her mouth, and her eyes became moist. Roland believed that the other witches went through the same feelings as she did – they had finally broken away from the evil identity the Church had forced upon them, and were now finally able to walk under the sun like any other person. Roland smiled brightly and patted her head, “You don’t need to be afraid, just speak some thankful words in response to everyone’s enthusiasm. Don’t forget that from now on you are the representative of the Witch Union.”

“Um...” She sniffed and wiped her the tears flowing over her face, bowed to everyone then said, “Th-thank... thank you!”

Chapter 242 - New Construction Area

The award and honor ceremony lasted until noon, as he had to fill two positions at the same time, commentator, and host, Roland couldn't help but feel utterly exhausted by the end. Luckily the ceremony finally came to its perfect conclusion with the bell sounding at midday simultaneously with Echo's gun salute. But when he came back bathed in sweat back to the castle and stepped on the third floor, he was surprised to see Anna smilingly leaning against his office door.

“What happened?”

“You'll know when you step inside,” she blinked with her pair of lake blue eyes.

It's improbable that this would be a trap, Roland confusedly thought as he pushed open the door only to then freeze in surprise — at the sight of the twelve witches neatly standing in two rows in front of him, Wendy and Scroll were standing at the front. The moment they saw the Prince appear, they held the sides of their dresses, bent their knees in a curtsy and offered him a salute.

“Keke. What are you...”

Scroll was the first to speak, “Your Highness, with the action you have performed today, you have proven that everything you have told us was true. We sisters are all deeply grateful for this. No words can ever describe our gratitude, please allow us continue serving you.”

“So, it was like that,” Roland sighed in relief. “I almost thought that all of you wanted to collectively say goodbye.”

“Pfft,” Wendy couldn’t stop herself from laughing, “How could that be Your Highness? This place is the Holy Mountain us witches have dreamed of. As long as you don’t desire for us to leave, we hope that we can live here forever.”

“And that is exactly what I want to see... In fact, there is no need for you to be so grateful, me helping you wasn’t a selfless act, it was also in order to help myself. There is no need for you to be so formal, I prefer your relaxed and unrestrained appearances much more than this.”

“Humph! I already said that it wasn’t necessary for us to be so formal,” Lily snorted. “And as you can see, now he thinks we’re being too serious.”

“How can you say that? You also readily agreed to come over,” Mystery Moon whispered, “Traitor!”

“Alright everyone, let’s go to the dinning hall, His Royal Highness still needs to change his clothes,” Scroll ordered while helplessly tapping her forehead, “That’s right, I have heard from Miss Anna that recently you have gone to bed late every evening. Please take care of yourself, you must not fall before that one goal is achieved.”

“Feel relieved,” Roland smiled. “For I am in good health.”

Afterward, the witches left one after another, only Anna stayed behind.

“Why did you stay behind, do you also want to express your gratitude to me?” Roland asked mischievously.

“Ah, I wish to say the same as them,” Anna raised the corner of her mouth, ” ‘No words can ever describe my gratitude.’ ”

“And also... do you want to always live in Border Town?”

“No, not always. ”

These unexpected words startled Roland, and his heart began to jumping fiercely, “Why is that?”

“Because it is unlikely that you will stay in Border Town forever,” Anna said, tilting her head. “...no matter where you go, I will always follow you.”

His heart suddenly filled with warmth, from the first day since he had known her, she had never changed her promise. No matter if she received the invitation from the Witch Cooperation Association, or during the critical moment in the battle against the demonic beasts, she had always chosen to stand by his side.

At this moment, Anna suddenly took two steps forward, then

gently hugged him.

“Wait, I’m covered in sweat,” Roland tried to warn her.

But rather than giving him a reply the young woman placed her head on his chest and took a deep breath as if she wanted to imprint his scent into her memory. He finally gave up any thought of pushing her away, instead opened his arms and enclosed her in his embrace, not releasing her for a very long time.

...

After lunch, Roland rushed to the bathroom to take a cold shower and afterward threw himself back into work.

He had called Karl van Bate over, spread a detailed map of Border Town out on the table, then pointed to a position along the Redwater River, “I want you to construct a bridge here.”

“Not a pontoon bridge?” After pondering about it for a while, Karl opened his mouth and said, “Your Highness, please excuse me for being outspoken, but at this place the Redwater River is already close to 100m wide, if you want to build there a stone bridge will be almost impossible to achieve. Even if we consider building an arch bridge, at most it would only cross one-third of the needed distance. Furthermore, the Redwater River’s water flow rate is so enormous, that it is impossible to anchor a bridge-pier for a very long time, even if we used stakes the size of a person, it would still be washed away after a time... With the exception of wooden rafts used as a pontoon bridge, it is impossible to build a bridge across

the entire river.”

“This won’t be a stone bridge. You will be building a steel bridge,” Roland answered, “Altogether it will have three spans to cross the river. However, the middle of the bridged piers will be handled by the witches. You only need to get the position of the bridgeheads ready in advance. Construct a slope on both ends of the bridge, so that the whole bridge is raised to such an extent that a river boat can pass it without having its mast touching the bottom of the bridge.”

“Won’t that be a bridge which reaches into the sky?” Karl asked surprised.

“It will be enough if those parts of the bridge are 6 to 7 meters above the ground,” Roland said as he quickly sketched the schematic drawing from the three-span iron bridge. “In order to quickly open up the south bank, as well as construct the docks, there must be a bridge there which doesn’t affect the passing ships on the river. Even though a pontoon bridge is very simple to build, it is the equivalence to blocking the river channel, making it unfavorable for future development.”

The expedition of the First Army to King’s City by river brought Roland a lot of information. Currently, within the borders of Graycastle, the river would open the roads in all directions, and the other major cities were also mainly built next to a big river. In the case that he carried out any further military operations within the kingdom’s borders, he would then have to possess several heavy river gunboats. With them he would have a powerful weapon which had enough firepower to use when besieging cities

or conquering territory.

After all, the caliber used for the famous warship canon was far greater than what was used by the field artillery. And if he wanted to build more vessels, he would first need to build a dock, and due to this, the steel bridge plan had come into being.

“But I don’t possess any similar experience for building bridges...” Karl seemed to somewhat hesitate.

“Me neither,” Roland merely shrugged, “For the first time it is alright to go through the project slowly. It won’t be a problem if you first erect a test bridge at the shore, and afterward, moves it over to the Redwater River.” With this Roland incidentally also introduced the other side to the concept of using prefabricated components which could later be transported to the construction site, “Just like during the construction of the water towers, as Hummingbird reduced its weight, and your student Anna helped with assembling and welding the pieces together. If we will do it again like that, the project shouldn’t be too difficult.”

“I’ll obey... your order. Your Royal Highness,” he nodded.

“Apart from this, there is also another tremendously important project I will give you,” the prince moved his finger to the castle area, “I intend to expand the size of the backyard. I want it to contain all of the surrounding high grounds, and at the same time you should construct a three-story house here.”

If everything went well, next month Tilly’s five witches would

arrive in Border Town, however, the castle no longer possessed any extra rooms. Although the rooms could temporarily be turned into three person rooms, the number of witches would only continue to increase with time, and it would be impossible for things to remain like this. Offering a superior living environment with all kinds of novelty and cozy experiences, was also a part of his strategy for convincing them to stay. No matter if they were people from ancient times, it would be hard for them to live in a frugal environment after becoming accustomed to luxury, or to use the sugarcoated-bullet method of modern people, ‘a good and easy life will always make people addicted’.

“A three-story... brick house?”

“Not an entirely brick house,” Roland smiled, “The correct name to call it with should be brick-concrete structure; the pillars, and beams of the house are all made out of reinforced concrete, similar to bones within a human body. A structure like this will allow us to build houses which are even higher, increasing it to a four or five story building wouldn’t be a problem either.”

“Reinforced... concrete?” Karl replied confused.

“It is a mixture consisting of cement, sand, stone and reinforced with steel bars implanted into it,” Roland explained. “Of course, the precise amount of each ingredient will need to be strictly tested, but in case the project is successful, it will even be stronger than natural limestone.”

However, this was only theoretical, such a product would have a very broad range of quality, that was similar to concrete. The self-

mixed cement bought in rural areas and the cement purchased at configured mixing stations were entirely different things. And the same was also true for the quality of steel reinforcing bars... Some people living in the rural areas, when they built their houses themselves, they wouldn't even use pebbles or use thin bamboo or wire in place of steel reinforcing bars. When Roland had gone to the countryside, he had witnessed the whole building process of several of these "county estates".

And now he also intended on doing it himself, after all, it would just be a three-story house, no matter how much they skimmed on the job and stinted the materials, it would still be difficult for it to collapse.

In addition, he hoped that the witch's residential building project would let Karl grasp the concept of it and let him change its form, to turn it into a perfect building material like engineered stone. As for its achievement within the construction industry, buildings made out of reinforced concrete occupied nearly half of the country. However, Roland wasn't proficient in architecture, everything he knew was only superficial knowledge he learned during his time in the countryside. He therefore thought that broadening the mason's horizons and leading him to path of developing it himself, was the right approach.

"Uh... will you also let me slowly explore it by myself? Karl finally asked.

"No," Roland smiled, "This is something I can teach you."

Chapter 243 - Establishment Of The Intelligence Organization

After the moon appeared in the sky, the hot air gradually cooled down. From Theo's place in his garden, he could see the light that was coming through the windows of the distant pubs, brothels, and casinos. Within the curtain of the night, they looked the same as all the many stars in the night sky, showing a city's bustling.

It was only possible to see such a scene in King's City inner city – even though the demonic disease came to its end, nearly one-third of the population of the outer city had already died. However, all of that couldn't affect the mood of the noble's drinking parties. If he listened carefully, he could hear their subtle cries being carried over by the evening breeze.

He had spent one hundred and fifty gold royals to buy this house with its garden and pond. Its location was on top of a hillside that was near the outer edge of the inner city, and even during the day, there weren't many people that were strolling through the neighborhood. Besides when Theo met with his informants to exchange the newest gathered intelligence, he usually didn't live here. He would instead choose to stay in an inn for the night, or go to the Covert Trumpeter and stayed there for a few days.

“My Lord, by now everyone should be present.”

A man carrying an oil lamp came out of the house, it was Hill Fawkes, one of the members of the Skeleton Fingers.

“Take the candle, I will follow after you.” Theo nodded, and soon entered the house.

In the dim candlelight, he saw Hill and five other men sitting around a round table, when they saw the personal guard appear they got all up and bowed in salute. Theo expressionlessly sized all of them up, hoping to catch even the smallest movement in their expressions, to see whether they were reliable or not. Unfortunately, Miss Nightingale had followed the fleet back to Border Town, if she were still here, he would have been able to make accurate judgements almost instantly.

They were Hill’s partners, the former members of the acrobatic troupe “pigeon and cylinder”, who were full of hate against the New King and had sworn to exact vengeance. One week ago, prior to the attack on the pier, by lucky coincidence, one man had concealed himself as a member of Dreamland Water and had him informed him about the rats’ plan to attack in advance. Nowadays where the incident of the demonic disease had gradual settled down, he decided to meet with his men in King’s City face to face. If it was really like Hill had said, contrary to what one might expect they might indeed be pretty good seedlings to use as a spy.

“With the exception of Mr. Fawkes, all the others should give a simple introduction of themselves.” Theo began.

Taking the lead, the man with the most muscular body said: “My name is Rocky Hill, Sir.” He was nearly six feet tall and with his bulging muscles in his arms he appeared to be incredibly strong. “Within the acrobatic troupe I played the role of the strong man. Currently, I’m a member of the Bloody Sails.”

“I’m a clown,” the little man sitting next to Rocky Hill said, while pointing to his nose. He seemed to be the youngest of their group, around 18 to 19 years old. “Within the troupe it was only natural that I became the clown, however, contrary to the others I haven’t sneaked into the ranks of the rats. Instead I go from one tavern to another, and show off some tricks.”

“Joe and Neal,” the following two men were a pair of brothers, regardless of whether it was their appearance or their style of clothing, there was no difference between them and the commoners living in the outer city. They had offered all of their possession to Priest Ferry and were now so called, “devoted believers of the Church”. Theo couldn’t stop but ask himself, can it be that these two men had both felt affection for Hill’s wife at the same time? Forcing down his doubts, he turned to the last person.

“I’m called a magician by them all, Sir,” the last one said, saluting once again, “I originally pretended to be a frustrated person and entered Dreamland Water, but unfortunately most of them are already dead or fled by now, even ‘Fierce Teeth’ Tanis was killed by the Church’s Army of Judges. Currently, everyone else is occupied with seeking a new organization.”

“He was killed by the Army of Judges?” Theo raised his brow. “Weren’t they secretly supported by the Church?”

“I only heard the news from others,” he spread out his hands, “After their attack on the docks was repelled, Tanis and his men then suffered an ambush from the Skeleton Fingers during their retreat to the eastern district. In the end, he had only a few dozen

people left by his side. On that same night, he left the nest once more and went to the Church in anger, but by the next day, only two to three of his cronies made it back. According to their explanation, Priest Ferry and he had began to quarrel, which was cut short after a Judge shot into his chest... All in all, Dreamland Water is dead.”

So, that’s how it was, Theo thought. Presumably, because he had nearly lost nearly all accumulated strength he had gathered after great difficulty, Fierce Teeth felt that his position as the gang leader was in immediate danger. In his desire to save it, he tried to seek the assistance of the Church but was refused which then led to the dispute. But all these minor details are unimportant, the only important news for me is that only the name Dreamland remains, yet in reality they are already as good as gone. This is definitely good news, maybe I can take advantage of this opportunity to draw in some of the homeless rats and use them to expand my intelligence source.

“Surely you all have already heard my name from Hill,” Theo knocked on the table and waited until the sound fell. “I am a personal guard of His Highness Roland Wimbledon, I am responsible for collecting intelligence from all parts of the kingdom. Since you all have willingly arrived here, from a certain attitude, it can be said that you have already made your intentions clear. However, to be certain that this dangerous mission will be successful, I still have to ask at least once, are you willing to work for His Royal Highness?”

“We are willing!” The five said in unison.

“As long as Timothy Wimbleton will receive his punishment, I’m willing to do anything,” Hill stated, slowly pressing out each word.

“Excellent, then by next week at the same time, we will meet here again. In case there is any critical information, you can also report it to me in advance – just put a pot of purple flowers at the entrance of my house.” Theo explained, “After I noticed it, I will be waiting in this room for you to come in the night. However, remember to knock on the door and use our secret signal of three-longs and two-shorts, understood?”

Seeing them nod in unison, Theo said in satisfaction, “A qualified spy will never lightly expose themselves, so the first thing you need to do is to conceal your identity. No matter if you’re gathering information by yourself or are developing a network to collect suspicious information, you have to always bear this in mind. In case you need further money, you can come with the request to me... Remember, in every action, one must never act blindly, without thinking it over first. It is improbable that Timothy will sit on the throne forever, this is a promise given by His Highness Roland Wimbleton himself.” He paused, “With all this said, are there any questions left over?”

“Sir, today Timothy had returned from the Eastern Region back to King’s City,” Hill said, “You should have already heard of this news.”

This afternoon a procession of the new king’s knights holding up his banner had entered the City through the East Gate, which was a scene witnessed by many citizens. But he wasn’t sure if Theo had already heard about what happened afterward.

“But in the evening, I heard from Black Hammer, that Timothy intended to recruit some rats for his army, and in exchange for their pledge of loyalty they would receive the opportunity to become free people. Several leaders of the Skeleton Fingers already went to the royal palace, so it doesn’t sound like a fabrication.”

Drafting the rats? On the surface, Theo was able to keep a calm expression, but his heart suddenly sank. It was evident that those rats would never be able to serve as regular soldiers, so the most likely possibility was that they would be made to consume strengthening pills and would afterward be sent to start surprise attacks, the same as last time when they attacked Longsong Stronghold. The only question though, was who their target was going to be this time.

“That’s actually an interesting piece of news,” he said. “Remember to always pay attention to those rats whereabouts, in case you hear any other news, immediately come to me to report it.”

Hopefully, Timothy isn’t thinking of dashing against the Western Territory, Theo thought.

Chapter 244 - Identity Registration

Outside of the western city walls, under the guidance of the First Army, the refugees were undergoing an unprecedented identification inspection.

By now, Barov had naturally come to understand that the resource which His Highness regarded as the most important was people. In order to bring all of these people back to Border Town, His Highness had spent a lot of gold royals and had even sent the First Army on an expedition to King's City. When Barov had seen the final bill from Margaret's chamber of commerce, he had almost climbed up the wall.

Adding up the caravan's charter fees, the transportation fees, and the fees for the food supply after half a month, the Prince had spent more than two thousand gold royals, which was equivalent to the price of four steam engines. If they hadn't received the deposit for the transformation of two ships by last month, Barov was afraid that the financial report statistics this time would have shown a deficit.

After the evacuation of the people, the task of creating this cumbersome and huge statistics had all been placed on his shoulders. Almost all of the City Hall officials and apprentices had been dispatched to set up the wooden sheds and the related lines for the crowd, so that they could start with writing the classification statistics. Seeing the more than a dozen lines of refugees all slowly going through the inspection, it was as if Barov was seeing a group of moving coins.

Compared to the lines for the ordinary civilians' registration, the line for the professionals that he himself was personally responsible for was far more deserted. Until now, there had only been fifty to sixty people come in.

"I am... a carpenter," a middle-aged man said after slowly walking over, "I heard that any craftsman can get their own place to live?"

"That's right," Seney Darley then further asked. "What's your name? Are you able to read?"

The former knight of the Wolf Family had come over from the Ministry of Agriculture. But he had managed not to make any mistake, which left Barov very satisfied that he chose him for this task. Although this had to do with demographic statistics, the City Hall unfortunately only had a small number of people who had learned how to read and write, so without any better option, they had no other choice but to pull all of the literate people from the other departments together here.

"Uh... to answer Sir, my name is Maser." The other party paused, "I must admit, I have never learned how to read.

"You can't read or write?"

"Yes," the middle-aged men nodded.

"Well, as a carpenter then..." Sirius turned his attention to the

pile of questions on the table, looking for the one marked with carpenter, “Ah, found it. Let me ask you a few questions.

The preliminary trial method was an idea His Highness came up with, he had gathered craftsman from all kinds of industries, inquired them about specialized knowledge together with some problems and their corresponding method to deal with them. He then recorded all of their answers and formulated a set of questions. As a result, as long as they compared the given answers with the answers on the form during the audit, they would immediately know if the other party was lying or not. It was the first time that he had ever seen such a method used to detect lies. Barov couldn't help but want to applaud the devil's mind, if the other side wasn't engaged in the industry, most civilians would never be able to understand these concepts. In case someone wanted to feign his occupation, as long as they asked two to three questions, the liar would be choked speechless.

“What kind of tool is used to flatten a wooden surface?”

“It's... a carpenter's plane, Sir.”

“What are the commonly used saws?”

“Frame saws and two-man saws, occasionally hand saws when cutting small items.”

Several questions later, Maser could almost answer all of them, and with every further right answer, his voice became more smooth and easy.

“Ah, it seems you are indeed a carpenter,” but the moment Sirius wanted to write down his identity into the register, Barov interrupted him.

“Sir?”

“Don’t be so quick with your judgment, first you have to examine his hands,” then he said to Maser, “Stretch out your hands.”

The moment Maser heard this command he felt startled, but he then spread out his hands with a look full of confusion on his face – the skin on his palms was very rough, fissured and had many traces of earth particles, furthermore below every finger were thick calluses, all in all, they looked very weather-beaten.

“If he was a carpenter, then his palms should not be so rough, especially those two pads beneath the palm, due to constantly rubbing over the wood, they should be smooth and hard. Furthermore, carpenters often need to use black paint to draw contour lines, therefore their palms will often be stained with a black ink that is hard to wash off, turning their palms black instead of yellow.” Barov calmly explained. “Another point, before he gave you an answer he would always break eye contact – many people who were trying to recall something that they didn’t usually do in the past, would show a similar kind of expression to this. However, if was a real carpenter, he would have given his answers in a very natural manner.”

“Understood... then,” Sirius’ eyes became large.

Barov looked at the astonished Maser, then said with a heavy voice, “You should have heard the warnings of the First Army when they called you over, any act of impersonation, deception or refusal of register will be severely punished. Either by being sentenced to work in the mines, or being expelled from the Western Territory, so if you understand this, do you still think you are a carpenter?”

“No, Sir, I was wrong!” Maser said, falling to his knees. “My neighbor was a carpenter, I would just often watch him work!”

“Then go over there and line up.”

Seeing the other flee, Sirius asked full of wonder, “Sir, how do you know all these things?”

“During the Months of Demons, I have done a census for His Highness. I had to deal with every carpenter in the town, and at that time I conveniently recorded such information,” Barov answered while pretending to be unconcerned. But when he saw the admiration and shock in the knight’s face, a feeling of pride arose within his heart.

Although the devil’s methods appeared to be clever, in the end, some people will eventually deceive it, and only people like himself, have the talent needed to make up for His Highness deficiency.

But under the influence of His Highness, their recent approach to

deal with such problems was no longer the same as it was in the past... Barov couldn't help but secretly sigh. For example, commoners of the previous kind, in the past it had been important to punish them with in a thunderous manner, in order intimidate those who would otherwise begin to stir. But nowadays he had to let all of them go, this was most likely because the Prince wanted to save gold royals – after all, every refugee here was worth a lot of money. In case they didn't live and work in Border Town for several years, they would simply not have been worth the expenses of transporting them over such a long distance by ship.

When the next refugee passed the specialized inquiry, instead of immediately writing him into the register, Sirius first looked to Barov for his approval.

Who in return seized the man up, and then nodded, “Write his details into the register, I will take him to see His Highness.”

After going through a passage in the city wall, they came to a stop in front of a shed set up for His Highness, which was also the last checkpoint.

Here, they would receive His Highness's personal inquiry. If it is confirmed that there is no problems, they would be given a “Resident Identity Card (ID)”, and from then would become a formal resident of Border Town. With the current lack of houses in the inner town, they had no other choice than to give priority and provide the first living places to the artisans. While the refugees with no particular skill, had no other option than to wait outside of the wall for two to three months.

Barov also possessed a ID card – it was a sheet of hard paper painted with color. It was almost palm sized and on the left upper corner was a painting of his head, which looked the same as a real person. While his name, address and number was written in the middle. The back of the card in turn was covered with the Graycastle's crest and His Highness personal seal. No matter if it was the paper itself or the film it was wrapped into, they were both very strange. Whether it was by soaking it in water or trying to burn it in a fire, nothing could damage the ID card.

There was no doubt that this thing was certainly made by the witch named Soraya. It seemed that His Highness intended to spread the ID card to the whole town, so that in the future whether it was to buy food or pay, they would have to show their certificate.

Since His Royal Highness had awarded the medal to the young lady of the Pine Family during the Award and Honor Ceremony, it had become evident that the Prince no longer intended to hide the existence of the witch. Which in turn meant Barov had finally to come to a conclusion of who was right and who was wrong, the Devil or the Church... unexpectedly discovering that there was a faint hope within his heart that His Highness can defeat the Church and ultimately unify the Kingdom of Graycastle.

There was no doubt, the higher position His Highness could achieve, the greater the reward he could reap would become.

Of course, there was still a long way to go before they reached that moment, so it could still be put aside and considered later on. By now the population of Border Town had surpassed Longsong

Stronghold's, furthermore, His Royal Highness had also revealed his next year's construction plan – once the town was connected with the stronghold, more than half of the Western Territory would be turned into one city, with a size that was undoubtedly larger than King's City, becoming the most magnificent city of Graycastle. And at that time, as the City Hall Premier Minister, what kind of promotion would he receive?

Barov's heart was full of expectation for the future.

Chapter 245 - Means Of Transportation

Roland sat on his office chair, carefully looking over Barov's report statistics.

It took the city hall three full days to sort out all 6000 refugees, coming out with the low number of 186 artisans who had managed to pass the audit in the end. Of course, this small number was also related to the effort they had put into the verification, after all, this involved the distribution of houses as well as IDs.

It was Roland's vision that from now on, only people in possession of such an ID would be considered official citizens of Border Town. Thus he needed to install proper safety measures, while the numbers were still small, which would also help him to better control the his core supporters inside the town. Using this, when the population started growing further, he could use the strength of his people to help assimilate the newcomers among them. After all, humans were social animals, as long as the environment continued with this way of living, more and more people would eventually come to approve of his ideas. Furthermore, he would indeed lead his people into a better life.

"The final room arrangement for the artisans will be done by you, no matter if they are unmarried or have a family to feed, they will at least have their own apartment assigned to them," Roland commanded.

"Yes," Barov agreed, "May I ask Your Royal Highness, are these houses to be given as a present?"

“They will be rented,” he shook his head, “The reason why the native citizens received houses as a gift was because most of them had already owned a house before this, it can be considered as exchanging their former house for a new home. But if we now also gift a house to the new inhabitants, they won’t be motivated to leave their houses and throw themselves into their work. Of course, we can still calculate a relatively cheap rent for them, and we can also tell them that as long as they work hard and save enough gold royals they could always buy their own house in the future.”

“I understand.”

For a moment Roland was silent, but then he suddenly asked: “After the Award and Honor Ceremony, how many people have fled the town?”

“Up to today, there have been none among the ranks of native civilians, and there were seven within the ranks of the serfs,” Barov paused. “However, there were more within the refugees from the Eastern Region, of them a total of one hundred and fifteen has already chosen to leave.”

“Is that so?” Roland softly sighed, the moment he had decided to push the witches to the front of the stage, he knew that something like this would happen. Therefore, in order to assess the public response and to avoid any accidents from happening, Roland had especially stationed a firearm teams several miles away from the town. There they could temporarily stop these people from running away and at the same time could also count the number of fleeing people, this way they could hold a survey on the general

level of the acceptance of witches.

Even though the result wasn't perfect, it was excellent that at least the Border Town's natives had ultimately come to accept the existence of the witches, something which was along his prediction. The number of serfs who have fled was less than that he had expected, showing that the effect of the theater performance was quite good. Yet within the ranks of refugees from the Eastern Regions who had openly accepted the treatment from the witches and were moreover also in a desperate situation – with their houses destroyed and no homeland for them to return to – had more than a hundred people who had chosen to leave, which came as a bit of a surprise to Roland.

“Your Royal Highness, I suggest that we sentence all of these people who have tried to flee to death,” Barov said calmly, “Since they still decided to leave, even considering their situation, they must be people who have been deeply affected by the Church. So, for the foreseeable future, they will never choose to side with Your Highness. In all likelihood they will become firm believers of the Church, for people like them, there is no need to show any kindness.”

“This is not necessarily the case... the truly devoted believers of the Church should be those three hundred people who decided to not leave King's City and instead face the demonic disease.” The Prince closed his eyes, “Perhaps these people are just unable to change their minds, still thinking that the witches are evil and this made them want to flee.”

“Even if that's the case, they are still your potential enemies,”

Barov insisted.

In fact, if he met that group of people on the battlefield, Roland would defeat them without any hesitation, but that didn't mean that he was following this era's backward way of thinking, wantonly swinging the butcher's knife to kill a group of civilians. Something like that would be against his ethical belief. So after a short hesitation, he finally rejected the suggestion, "I will let Nightingale go and interrogate the runaways, in case there is a hidden spy or scout in their ranks, they will be seized and hanged, all the others will be expelled from the Western Territory."

Hearing his words, Barov gave him a meaningful glance and then lowered his head, only then did he slowly agree, "As you bid, Your Royal Highness. "

"Do you have anything else to report?"

"For the time being, no, Your Highness," he coughed twice. "I'll now go and deal immediately with the allocation of the houses."

"It isn't urgent, you can take your time with that issue," Roland opened his eyes then stood up, "First come with me to take a few pictures and we can relax the mood."

"Taking... pictures?" Barov asked shocked.

"You'll recognise it immediately," the Prince answered with a smile.

Entering the castle's front yard, they saw that Carter, Iron Axe, and Soraya who he had previously called had already arrived. Placed in the corner of the garden were several pieces of four to five meter long planks, while an item on the ground that was covered with canvas.

“For now, Border Town is still considered small, but when the land in the south is developed, and the road between Longsong Stronghold and Border Town is finished, it's scale will be dozens of times larger than it is now. By that point, you will have to spend one or two days on the road if you want to walk from the eastern side to the western one. Therefore, we need something that allows us to travel faster from one place to another. However, breeding horses is not only very expensive, but it is also impossible for every citizen to invest a lot of time for learning how to ride them.” Roland said as he opened the canvas, “Because of this, I plan to promote this new type of transportation method in Border Town, it is easy to use, and its price is also much lower than a horse.”

“What is this...?” Carter was instantly attracted to the novelty, “It has two wheels and an iron shelf, is it a cart?”

“The two wheels are placed in front of each other, instead of side by side, it will be tough to maintain balance,” Barov shook his head. “I do not see how it will be able to replace horses.”

Only Iron Axe kept silent, calmly waiting for the Prince to explain further.

Roland smiled, “This thing is called a bike, I will demonstrate how you should use it.” He placed both feet on top of the pedals, assumed a standard starting posture, one foot on a pedal, then he began to ride the bike along the path of the flower garden.

With Anna’s welding technique and Soraya’s coating skill, producing a bike manually wasn’t challenging at all. Its principle and structure didn’t hold any difficulty, for example, the rubber required for the inner tubes had been replaced by coating, which was directly drawn over a paper roll. With regards to this, Roland even customized a simple and easy to use bicycle pump. While the outside and the breaks of it were made with a hardened leather coating. The frame was made out of hollowed pipes, and for the brake wire, they had used a copper wire and an anti-corrosion coating. The only issue was with the chain, for it, he needed to completely rely on Anna, cutting and shaping one chain link after another and afterward connecting them all to a string. As for the kind of pedal, which were directly installed on top of the wheel as had been used for the first bicycles, he didn’t even consider them.

Coming to the end of the lap, Roland pressed the brakes, easily jumped off the bike and turned around only to be faced with a row of stunned men, which caused his heart to fill with pride. This was the reaction a change to a superior mount deserved. Compared with horses, that needed to be tamed and fed, bicycles seemed to be more frugal.

“I’m going to open a new bicycle factory in the industrial district, for the production of this transportation tool. But for this we not only need to recruit workers, but we also have to make them known the publicity, promoting them to the whole territory as soon as possible,” Roland briefly explained. “This is also the

purpose why I called you over today. You will first learn how to ride this bike, and then let Miss Soraya paint a picture of you riding them on top of the planks. I want all my subjects to know that as long as they spent one or two gold royals, they can have the same mounts as the Lord, First Army Commander, Chief Knight, and City Hall Premier Minister all have.”

Chapter 246 - New Gunpowder Program

What was the symbol of the industrial age, Roland first thought was of a speeding train continuously running down a railroad track, emitting rolling clouds of steam.

The cast-iron cylinder covered with oil, the thick and robust crankshaft together with those huge iron wheels, its rumble and vibration full of vibrant rhythm, as well as the sound of the steam-whistle piercing through the vast sky was what was associated with the machinery of the first steam trains. Compared with the mechanical designs of the later generations, which hid its structure under an outer shell, used high-precision machining to reduce the tremoring and a mechanical system which emphasized sound insulation and sound absorption the first engines undoubtedly showed more directly the power and beauty of industrialization.

He also wished to cover the territory with railroad tracks so that trains towing railway carriages with goods and people could go to and from all part of the Western Territory. Yet even though this was a good dream, it was still just a dream. Actually, it was not unthinkable to manufacture a steam train, only that the large amount of steel needed for the tracks would be far above the production capacity of the North Slope Mine Kiln's group.

Therefore, he could only settle for second best, which left the human-powered bicycles as Roland's best option. The flatter the roads within his territory were built, the greater the benefits of cycling would be. Furthermore, compared with the relatively complex structure of the steam trains, a bike almost didn't require any maintenance at all, besides occasionally putting some oil on the chain.

If Roland wanted to start mass production of bicycles, he naturally couldn't let Anna produce all of them by herself, so he had to first open a factory and train a group of workers that would specialize in the production and assembly of bicycles. Considering that the earliest date for the completion of the Kingdom Avenue would be in next spring, it wasn't necessary that the factory would immediately be able to produce large batches. Due to this, it was possible that the workers could slowly become familiar with the needed production lines made by Anna and would only needed to produce a dozen bicycles for the first month. One of the most technical demanding parts was the chain, every chain link had to be made with a stamping press and would afterward be connected with a pin by hand.

However, to manufacture the parts made out of rubber, like the tires and brakes, Roland would still need to rely on Soraya's ability. But as long as all the other parts were ready, Soraya could always draw her magic pen and quickly draw a lot of them. The same was true for the bearings. Since he couldn't produce reliable ball bearings, he could only take a cut off part of an iron part and use it as a sliding bearing. For that, the inner ring became coated with a smooth mirror coating, which produced an effect which wasn't much worse than the former method.

When the first bikes would be sold, only the nobility would be able to afford such an expensive vehicle, but in order to spread this to the masses and create a hype, Roland also intended to implement an payment by installment system to minimize the burden caused by purchasing as much as possible. Of course, only people that were in possession of an ID could go to the City Hall and apply for such a payment.

The three had trained for a whole afternoon, Carter Lannis, worthy of the title of the Chief Knight, was the first to master the skill of cycling; followed by Iron Axe, who was the second to successfully cycle around the garden. Only Barov, who after trying it more than a dozen times was still unable to succeed; and was only able to advance in a crooked line, almost falling to the ground. In the end, Roland had Soraya draw a static scene of him standing beside the bicycle and holding the handlebar.

“Are they all right?” the witch asked after completing the fourth propaganda poster.

“Almost, you only have to add a few advertising words.” After thinking for a moment, Roland added, “Above you should write: a new era of mounts, I own one and you can also own one. While beneath you should write: Bicycle factory is recruiting workers. Generous payment, as well as the opportunity to receive a free bicycle which will belong to you. Those who have completed the primary education, can apply at the City Hall.”

...

After dealing with the bicycle advertisement, the Prince returned to his office to take advantage of the time that was left until dinner and let his guards call Kyle over.

Now, after having finally made a breakthrough for the development of mercuric acid, developing a new generation of weapons was to be put onto the agenda. In the age of firearms,

those who had the bigger caliber would become the justice, those with a faster rate of fire would achieve freedom, power brought honor, turrets brought equality... However, an awkward problem was, according to the current kind of development they had, by relying on only the laboratory the production of the two acids would not be able to keep up with the consumption.

For example, if he wanted to increase the rate of fire, he would need to reduce the remnants of black powder, and change to using pyroxylin the smokeless propellant, or some kind of mixture of pyroxylin and nitroglycerine. The same was true for high-powered explosives, it didn't matter if he couldn't produce trinitrotoluene (TNT), he could use nitrostarch instead, which except for its poor stability, would be much more powerful than TNT was.

No matter what kind of the previously mentioned methods he used, he would need a lot of high concentrations of fuming nitric acid, yet nitric acid purification required amounts of concentrated sulfuric acid the laboratory just couldn't meet. In other words, there was no way to produce the two acids at industrial levels. Even if he developed even more efficient weapons, he would once more fall into the plight of having no bullets to use them with.

After the Head Alchemist entered the office, Roland began, "I have a new assignment to hand you.

"Don't hesitate to tell me," Sichi answered while shrugging. "As long as I don't have to attend another honor and award ceremony."

"I need much more acid, but at the moment the chemical

laboratory alone is unable to meet my needs, thus your new task will be to design a chemical production system that can produce both acids efficiently and easily.”

“Chemical production... system?” Hearing the unknown words, Sichi looked a little puzzled.

“Yes, you have to create a apparatus which can mix several liquids and let them react, so that as long as you put in the raw materials, it is possible for it to produce a steady flow of the finished product.” Roland briefly explained the nature of industrial production, “I don’t know much about it, so you will have to rely on yourself to slowly work it out.”

That being said, the Prince knew that this was a very difficult task, and it was quite possible that even after years of study, it wouldn’t necessarily produce results. After all, the other could only rely on, the basic reaction principles and chemical equations of “Elementary Chemistry”.

“I understand,” Sichi nodded. “Those ideas you come up with always let me feel refreshed.”

“No matter if you can do it or not, I’m in desperate need of the two acids.” Roland paused, “Thus for the next month I plan to extend the laboratory at the Redwater River by three more rooms and also to recruit some qualified candidates for the position of a laboratory technician from the citizen. In case you don’t have the time to personally teach them, just choose some of your apprentices to administer them. After all, the industrial acid production system will be a very long research project.”

Presumably because of the temptation of “Intermediate Chemistry,” Sichi readily responded, “Yes, Your Highness.”

After Kyle Sichi had left, Roland sighed softly.

In case there wasn’t any hope for the industrial acid production system, he could only have Lucia learn the purification of acid. And when all was said and done and the next war was coming, he would need to come up with some even more powerful weapons to gain victory for Border Town.

Roland opened the drawer, intending to eat some dried fish to dispel the boredom, only to discover that the snacks stored within the drawer were all gone now.

After gawking in disbelief, he looked up only to see that a dried fish had been handed to his mouth.

“Were you looking for this?” The blond woman standing opposite asked with a smile.

Biting into the dried fish, Roland couldn’t help but start to smile, “I thought you’d be staying in the fog for the rest of your lifetime.”

“That kind of life would also be nice, at least you couldn’t see me, but I could still see you.” Nightingale curled her lips.

Unknowingly to him, his originally dull mood had already been lifted by a lot. Now where he could once more see the other's familiar appearance, he couldn't help but breath out in relief, "Previously, you had said that you didn't know what kind of expression you should show..."

"Yeah?"

"In fact, I think this one is quite good."

Chapter 247 - Graduation Ceremony

“Look, it’s Lady Scroll,” Piper used his elbow to secretly poke Jilly, “I heard that she is the Head of the Ministry of Education.”

“Ministry of Education... The Minister?” The latter wondered, “What is that?”

“That’s the person who manages the teachers. Teachers like your most liked Teacher Ferlin and your most hated loudmouth teacher, Teacher Harben.” Piper explained, “No matter if it is Ferlin or Harben, all of them are supervised by Lady Scroll.”

“Where did you hear that?” Jilly blinked amazed, “Does it come from that important person you had mentioned?”

“Hrumph, of course,” he smiled proudly, “And that isn’t even everything, I know more. Today, it won’t be only the City Hall’s officials who will come to the Graduation, even the Lord, His Royal Highness himself is going to come to the college!”

“Really?” The little girl’s eyes light up, “His Royal Highness is coming to talk to us?”

“Er... this, I don’t know,” Piper touched the back of his head, “Probably.”

After all, he had heard all of this from his big brother, Van’er, who could now be considered as an important person. Originally,

he had only been a common gravel worker in the neighborhood, but after joining the militia, he had immediately become a platoon leader, and started leading several soldiers. Nowadays, he was even the artillery officer of the First Army, with a monthly salary of 25 silver royals and the possibility to shake the Prince's hand and talk to him!

Even though he spent the majority of his time in the barracks, but whenever he came back to visit, he would always bring back interesting new stories and information. And like always, Piper had once more come to his door to pester him for it, asking from the east to the west of everything. As big brother Van'er's former neighbor and admirer, Piper had often heard news in advance of time from Van'er's mouth.

For example, Van'er had already told him the news that His Highness himself would personally attend the graduation ceremony one week ago. Because of this the First Army had received a protection and alert order and had also held an exercise near the college.

And really, after waiting for a short moment, a team of soldiers, that were brimming with energy, wearing military uniforms all came over, escorting His Highness and the Chief Knight in between them.

As they saw them arrive, the crowd immediately began stirring.

After the soldiers surrounded the entrance of the college, Roland walked into the hall and waved to the rows of students, "My people, how are you? I am the Lord of Border Town, the man in

charge of the Western Territory, Roland Wimbledon. Congratulation on being Border Town's first batch of graduates to complete the whole content of primary education."

The crowd had suddenly turned silent, not because of indifference, but simply because most people were so excited that they didn't know how to respond.

Jilly continuously grabbed Piper's arm and exclaimed, "His Highness is talking to us!"

Piper felt an equally inspired, this way, he and big brother Van'er both had close contact with His Highness.

"The reason why you were able to rapidly go through the assessment and reached graduation is because most of you were former students of Karl van Bate, from the beginning you had a lead when compared to the other students. Therefore, you shouldn't become arrogant and complacent, there is still a lot of knowledge in the world only waiting for you to be explored." After a short moment, Roland continued, "Of course, this day is still worth celebrating, and from today on you will have embarked on a path that is very different from others. No matter what kind of work you involve yourself in, you will always be able to receive rich rewards. Today, I am here to express my congratulations to you!"

"His Highness... long live!" Piper didn't know who had shouted first, but afterward, everyone began to shout, "Long live His Highness! I am willing to serve His Highness!"

After waiting for the cheers to abate, Roland said cheerfully: “Next, I will release the diploma to you, as honorary proof for the completion of studies.” He opened a booklet, “Piper.”

Piper only felt how his whole body began to tremble, he looked towards the Prince, opened his mouth, but he didn’t know what the proper words were to say.

Seeing him freeze Teacher Ferlin Eltek turned towards him and waved, “Do not be afraid, come to His Highness.”

Rigidly moving his limbs Piper slowly walked out of the ranks, his heart already jumping so loud that he could hear it himself. He then suddenly remembered Van’er frequently mentioning a military salute that was simpler than the knight ritual of the nobility but still could express one’s loyalty and devotion, and had been made by His Highness himself. Although he wasn’t clear about the specific posture, but he still mustered all his courage and according to his memory placed his hand flat in front of his forehead.

Seeing his movement the Prince began to laugh, nodded and handed the booklet to Piper. “In the future, if you want to show it once more, move the hand a little, so that it is in line with your ear, this way it will be more to the standard... Congratulation on your graduation.”

“T-thank you,” Piper took the booklet and circled stiff as a log bag to the ranks. Only when His Highness began to give out the

diploma to the other people was he finally able to recover.

“Show me what’s written on it.” Jilly curiously turned her head.

“You will get your own ah, why are you so anxious,” Piper muttered in a low voice and opened the booklet cover with trembling hands, only to see a parchment with fine stitches on it. In the upper left corner was a painting of his head, in the middle was the royal emblem with the tower and pike, but there were also a few written lines of text on it. If it was but six months ago, he could only have gone to Teacher Karl and asked him for the meaning of the characters. However, today Piper had already accomplished the basics of reading and writing, so he quietly read it in his mind.

College of Border Town, first course of study graduate: Piper

Dean: Scroll

Issuer: Lord of Border Town, Roland Wimbleton

...

After Roland had handed out all diplomas he clapped his hands and once more attracted the attention of the crowd. “From now on, you can undertake some qualified works ordinary people can’t, and all of these jobs offer you a generous pay, with at least ten

silver royals a month. In the following, Miss Scroll will inform you about the details of the work you can get from City Hall.” He raised his hand to stop everyone’s discussion, “You do not have to make a choice immediately, you can go back home and discuss it with your families. After making your decision take your ID and graduation certificate and come to the City Hall for your application.”

Taking advantage of the time during which Lady Scroll introduced the several tasks, Jilly stepped close to Piper and asked, “Do you already have any idea what you want to do? I want to go to the bike factory, its payment is higher than that of my father and I will also get the chance to get a new bike free of charge!”

“It is indeed great,” Piper replied casually. Recently on the town square, four wide pieces of wood had been erected, on whose tops were paintings of the portraits of His Highness and several ministers, everyone holding or sitting on a strange iron mounts which had become the hot topic of many enthusiastic conversations. And with a salary of 15 silver royals a month, in case it wasn’t necessary to have completed the general education, Piper was afraid that the factory would already have been crowded to the point of bursting.

But he had thought that there was another better place to go to.

Since his visit of the Honor and Award Ceremony, Piper couldn’t suppress the image of himself standing in the same spot as his former classmate Nana. One day, receiving the glory, to get a reward out of His Highness hand, on top of a stage on the town’s square in front of thousands of people.

According to His Royal Highness, he must become an outstanding contributor to the town in order to be honored. In case he took a job to work in the bike factory, he feared that he would never get this opportunity even during his entire lifetime. But neither could he be like Iron Axe and lead the charge during in a war, nor did he have any similarly incredible ability as a witch did, so the only example he could follow was that of Head Alchemist Sichi.

Previously he had heard more than once, if he could grab the principal of refining an alchemical product, he would immediately bring immense wealth and prestige to the territory, and would also have achieved something that was worthy of the title of a sage. For that he needed to be neither brave nor have any powerful background, the only thing he needed was a bit of luck... making it to the most suitable way for him.

Thinking until here, Piper had made up his mind.

“I want to go and sign up for a job in the chemical laboratory,” he said, putting emphasis on every single word.

Chapter 248 - Sudden Change

Even during the hot summer, the ice at the top of Hermes' plateau never melted.

Standing on the top of the heaven tower and looking at the far distance, Mayne merely saw a mixture of two colors of the green grass and the white snow from the wilderness behind the walls, resembling a scar left behind by war during the Months of Demons. Within this climate it was impossible to grow any sort of crops, so all the food they consumed in the New Holy City came from Old Holy City that was at the foot of the plateau and brought up by some animal drawn carts.

After staying in the city for more than a decade, Mayne had already become accustomed to the omnipresent cold of Hermes.

“This time it will only be the two of us?” Tayfun pushed the door open and stepped in, “Furthermore, shouldn't we hold the meeting in the secret room?”

“Don't tell me that you are fond of being shut into that narrow place?”

“No... of course not,” the old Bishop touched his white beard. “If it wasn't for Heather being in charge of all the rules and proclaiming the commandments over and over, I would be only too eager to exchange information at this spot each time. Even if she became lost in the gossip of the city talk again, I would at least be able to enjoy the scenery of the Holy City below. And...” He

smiled and said, “I never expected someone like her who is always punctually, to not return on time.”

“Perhaps she had met with some difficulty,” Mayne said, going back to the table to take a place. “Or perhaps she is already on her way back.”

“Maybe...” Tayfun curled his lips, “You really should not help her look for an excuse, everyone should be able to send word even during their travels, these are words she had often said herself. Even if you are in trouble, you should always report to us first. Furthermore, she isn’t alone in the capital of the Kingdom of Endless Winter, so sending a messenger wouldn’t take any more effort than raising a finger would’ve.”

“Let’s leave that matter for later,” Mayne said, then pushed three letters over to Tayfun. “We seem to have a problem.”

“There’s trouble?” The latter became startled, but then sat down across of the round table, spreading out the letters, “Are this all bad news?”

“Yes,” he took a deep breath, “It’s so bad, that it can’t get any worse.”

Tayfun lost his smile and began to carefully read the first letter, “... the spread of the demonic plague has been stopped and the whereabouts of Faceless is unknown? Wait a moment, what is the demonic plague?”

“It is the result of the Pivotal Secret Area’s latest research, you do not need to know all of the details, you must only know that it can be regarded as a rapidly infectious disease,” Mayne simplified. In fact, according to what Grandmaster Crow Eye had said, it was a kind of micro-demonic beast, that after special cultivation would mutate to directly attack the human body, and the Holy Elixir able to restrain the disease were also demonic beasts, merely with an even more smaller body. “The cause of the disease cannot be directly observed with the eyes, and thus cannot be healed through conventional methods, and there should only be one kind of person that can stop the demonic plague.”

“Is that a witch?” Tayfun quickly thought of the answer.

“Moreover, it should be more than one.”

After reading the letter, the old Bishop hit with his fist on the table, “This idiot, what was he thinking? Not even mention that he wanted to let the rats encircle and annihilate the mercenaries, he had even sent out Faceless? In the end, isn’t he even aware of the fact how important a pure witch is for us?”

“His plan wasn’t wrong,” Mayen frowned, “If the numbers in the letter aren’t a lie, then a thousand rats should have been enough to annihilate those one hundred mercenaries. However, the other side seems to have powerful long-range crossbows, which can be continuously fired. Regarding this matter, I remember that Priest Taylor who was stationed in Longsong Stronghold had also mentioned that those weapons were the reason why Duke Ryan had lost his battle against a group of miners, the other side’s crossbow were simply too powerful. A shield could significantly

reduce the power of a crossbow bolt, but rats don't have any such equipment."

"Granted that it was right to send out those dregs, he should still have never easily sent out Faceless!" Tayfun answered enraged, "I'm afraid that after Heather comes back she will fly into a terrible rage, being able to grow a pure witch, furthermore, one with such a rare ability. The training alone is already very energy consuming. From a certain attitude, they are even more valuable than the God's Punishment Army."

"But whether it is a witch or the God's Punishment Army, in the end, their final goal is to annihilate the enemy, and gaining victory." Mayne slowly said, "Losing some of them during this process is inevitable."

"Don't tell me you are thinking of keeping Priest Ferry?"

"Do not forget the law of the Church," Mayne's voice sank, "Just viewing the outcome is the way the aristocracy loves to handle such matter. Although this was clearly a failure of Priest Ferry, but his motive and plan didn't have many issues, it was just that the enemy was so much stronger than expected. Of course, he will be punished, but the specific punishment we will have to be considered further."

"But Heather won't see it like this," Tayfun said, then shook his head and opened the second letter. "Don't forget that she is responsible for arbitration of the Church."

“I’ll inform her of it personally.”

Not long after, the old Bishop turned the over the letter in his hands, not daring to believe its words: “Timothy’s militia troops have committed a sneak attack on the Church in Longsong Stronghold, and even cleanly killed off all of our Priests? He must have gone insane!”

Actually, the content of the second letter came from two sources, one was the report of the strongholds Acting Duke Petrov and one was information that was sent by one of the local believers. All in all, it was certain that a military force from outside the Western Region had sneak-attacked the stronghold, and also looted the church. Not only had they used the Berserk Pills themselves, their main target was also the drugs that had been stored within the church... Therefore, it was a bit unclear from where the troops had come. They could not only be sent by the new King Timothy, they could also have been sent from the Queen of Clear Water Garcia. But after comparing both sides, it was clear that the former possibility was much more likely.

As for the latter’s message, Mayne had felt that it was a bit odd. According to the report sent by Petrov, after burning down the church, and withdrawing from the stronghold the other side had immediately gone missing without a trace, but shouldn’t they have been intercepted by the group of envoys? At this time the delegation should already have arrived in Border Town, making it impossible that the two groups haven’t met yet.

Seeing that Mayne wasn’t saying a word, Tayfun soon also became aware of this point and immediately took up the first letter

to read it again. Soon the wrinkles on his forehead began to form deep ditches, “Is it... possible that after getting rid of the envoys Roland Wimbledon pushed all the blame onto his elder brother Timothy?”

“We might as well speculate,” the Archbishop said, after a moment of silence. “Roland intended to obtain the group of low-cost population, thereupon he had assigned witches to treat the demonic plague and sent all of the refugees back to the Western Territory. Thus, in order to avert the envoys from becoming aware of him keeping witches, he sent his knights out to raid the envoy’s camp, not even giving them the opportunity to send out a pigeon and placed all of the blame on the stronghold attackers. After all, the Acting Duke depends on the support of Roland Wimbledon, so providing him with assistance to pass off a fake as genuine is also something which should be right. Of course... all this is merely our own speculation, but the disappearance of the messenger group is indeed too suspicious, and currently we have no energy to send out another group of messengers.”

“If it was like this, we should send out troops to punish his arrogance immediately,” Tayfun said coldly, “Even if the event of the disappearance of the envoys has nothing to do with him, being able to clean up the witches within the Western Territory is already worth it.”

Mayne didn’t offer a response, instead, he merely pointed to the third letter, “We should put off our discussion until you have read the third letter.”

Throwing a questioning gaze towards Mayne, Tayfun opened the

letter. Soon, his hands began to tremble, until he finally was almost unable to hold the thin paper, “How can there be so many witches within the Fjord, and what’s more, they have destroyed all of the churches there? Then this letter is...”

“From the Sea Dragon Bay, which was the last bastion of our Church to fall,” Mayne closed his eyes, and sank into the chair, his tone suddenly full of fatigue, “There is only one possibility if a large group of witches have emerged without any fore-warning in the Fjord, they must have immigrated from the mainland in the past.” Moreover, the letter even mentioned the appearance of an extraordinary, yet within the law and decrees of the Church, it is clearly regulated that once any traces of activity of an extraordinary witch is found, it has the precedence to dispatch the God’s Punishment Army to seize her. Yet the islands of the Fjord were simply too far away, and furthermore, the current battle with the Wolfsheart Kingdom is at an anxious moment, which makes it impossible for us to take into account the affair of the other side of the shore.

“Must we, or mustn’t we ask the Supreme Pontiff for instructions?” Tayfun asked.

“...” Mayne slightly shook his head, forcing down the over and over rolling feeling of powerlessly within his heart. Maybe this was the Church’s test given by God, only after cutting their way through the thistles and thorns would they be able to see God’s true intentions. Opening his eyes, he had finally recovered his former serene state, “The matters of the Holy Church of Hermes shall be handed by you and Heather.”

“Don’t tell me that you want to go to the Fjord?” The old bishop stared at him with wide open eyes.

“I will lead one hundred soldiers of the God’s Punishment Army together with some of the pure witches, to thoroughly clean out the Western Territory of the Kingdom of Graycastle, afterward I will take the opportunity to deal with the witches in the Fjord.”

“But the law says...”

Mayne immediately interrupted him, “That’s only the case when an extraordinary was found within the borders of the Four Kingdoms, but now she is separated from us by the sea and furthermore also had nothing to do with our plans. Do not forget, that in the end, we are only doing this to obtain more land and a larger population, so that we can continue to expand the size of the God’s Punishment Army. And by now, it became clear that the 4th Prince is a hindrance on the path to archive the goals.”

“But...” the moment Tayfun intended to interrupts, loud footsteps could be heard from outside of the hall, startling both men, who both coincidentally turned towards the door.

Only to see the door fly open with a loud bump, and a magistrate rushing into the room in a helter-skelter manner, “Bad news, Your Excellencies, bad news!”

“Speak a little calmer,” Mayne shouted, “Report slowly what you have to say.”

“Her Excellency Heather has sent an emergency letter, a large fleet has landed on the coast of the Kingdom of Endless Winter, and by now a large force of the enemy is besieging King’s City, the situation is imminently dangerous. The other’s sea-faring vessels are all uniformly sailing under black sails, and a blue flag of a sailboat and a crown that is flying at the mast.” The magistrate seemed to be extremely anxious, “The delivered news states, that two city gates have already fallen into the enemy’s hands and Her Excellency Heather is doing everything she can to resist with the help of the followers. However, besides the enemy’s large number, they are also using the Berserker Pills!”

“What?” For a long moment, Mayne couldn’t believe his own ears. Black sails, a sailboat with a crown...

The enemy was actually the Black Sail Fleet of the Queendom of Clear Water!

Chapter 249 - New Clearwater

The granite steps of the Kingdom of Endless Winter Capital's temple were dyed red with blood, and the sweet and strong smell of fish within the air assaulted the nostrils.

The ground was covered with corpses – there were former members of the God's Punishment Army, followers of the Church, people from their own side and also Sandpeople of the Mojin Clan. They had died in all kind of ways, but most of them had traces of burns, their limbs had been shattered into small pieces and their viscera spread everywhere. Ryan knew that they had died under the fire and impact let out by the fierce Snow Powder.

Whenever he took another step through the city, he felt as if he was placing his feet on a mountain of sticky guts. This battle had demonstrated that the battle will of the Church's Army of Judges and believers could only be described as madness. Even in the face of so many drugs strengthened slaves, they still had not shrunk back at all. Rather they used their own bodies as meat shields and firmly wrapped themselves around the enemy, trying to create a chance for their comrades to cause a fatal injury to their enemy – although the pills allowed people to become all powerful and unafraid of pain, their heart, neck, and head were still crucial areas like before. Her Majesty Queen Garcia simply did not have any extra armor to equip those cheap slaves with.

If they'd not had the snow powder, it would have been really hard to say how this battle might have unfolded.

But we won... Ryan's heart felt like it was blazing, in the end, we

still won!

The flag of the Queendom of Clearwater was already flying on top of the city walls, and even the Church's most unyielding stronghold had broken under the waves of their attacks. In this way, the Black Sail Fleet had broken apart the siege they were under and freed itself from the deadlock situation it had been in at the corner of Graycastle. Which allowed them to no longer fear that they would burn themselves out in an endless war of attrition.

Even entering the temple hall he was still able to see the picture of pure chaos, everywhere on the ground were fragments of shattered glass and streams of blood, but all of this was unimportant to him. He went directly to the woman standing at the other end of the hall and fell onto one knee before her, "Your Majesty, all four gates of the city have fallen and are now in the hands of your Black Sail Fleet, the capital of the Kingdom of Endless Winter is now yours."

"Thank you for your trouble, you can get up." Garcia raised her arm, holding her hand in front of him.

Ryan gently took the Queen's hand, placed a symbolic kiss on the back of her hand, and then got up to stand on her side.

"Strange ceremony," Kabala opened his mouth and said, "You haven't even touched the back of her hand at all, so why then put on such a display?"

The question came so sudden, he couldn't refrain himself from

frowning, but the other side was the patriarch of the Sandstone Clan, so it wasn't good to rudely reprimand in public, without any better option he said coldly: "This is a commonly used courtesy between aristocrats and stands for politeness and respect, to touch would show somebody's lack of manners, but as Sandpeople you're unable to understand this, so it's only normal."

"Is that so?" She raised her eyebrow, then pointed to her own neck, "We are obviously jointly allies of war, who just finished the battle a moment ago, yet you still put this kind of thing on me. The politeness and respect of your mainland people are really beyond comprehension for me."

Kabala's neck was enclosed by an iron ring, with a bulge in its middle, seemingly resembling an ornament, but Ryan knew that within it was a God's Stone of Retaliation embedded. Which with the exception of a unique key was tough to undo, but this key was always in Garcia's hands. Since the other was a witch, it was only naturally to be careful when dealing with her, but she indeed exerted herself extremely during the fight. In case they hadn't had her method of command, Ryan was afraid that their slaves that had been carrying the fierce Snow Powder, would have never dared to charge into their believers' strong defensive line. In the end, even after already opening his mouth, he didn't know how to refute her.

"Well, don't argue about such trivial matter," Garcia interrupted. "You mustn't forget the purpose of our coming – compared with this vast land, is it impossible for you to tolerate the stone?"

"I simply spoke without thinking the matter through," Kabala

shrugged, “I hope you will honor your promise.”

“Of course, this is the foundation of our cooperation,” the Queen smiled.

“What is your next task for the Black Sail Fleet?” Ryan asked.

“Let’s leave the discussion about the plans concerning the next step until later, for now, we should all take a look at a good show which is about to play out.” Garcia clapped her hands, instructing her personal guard, “Bring her in.”

Not long after, two armored guards led a woman with her hands tied at her back into the temple.

She was about thirty years old, had average looks, with messy brown hair scattered over her cheeks and wore the golden robe of the Church. It was of exquisite workmanship and was made out of materials which could generally only be worn by the Hermes’ Archbishops. However, right now, this gorgeous robe had been ripped in several places, and was stained with blood.

“This woman is an... Archbishop?”

“Yes,” the Queen of Clearwater raised the corner of her lips, “I have gone to several of the local nobility and made them confirm whether she was indeed one of the Church’s three Archbishops, Excellency Heather.” She looked at the other woman and asked, “How about it, am I telling the truth?”

“...” Heather did not answer, but Ryan could see a strong ridicule and disdain within her eyes.

Apparently, Garcia had also seen the expression within her eyes and thus chuckled twice, “I already knew that you wouldn’t surrender so easily, that’s also the reason why I was so kind and took you to the church. It was so that I could bring you back to your Kingdom of God. Here you may beg for God’s redemption as you beg me for forgiveness. First, I will slowly cut off your fingers. Then I will go on to your four limbs and then I will destroy all five of your senses. This way you will fully experience the suffering and helplessness of the citizens of the Port of Clearwater’s for yourself.”

“And afterward?” the female Archbishop suddenly asked, “What will you do when you are crushed by the Church’s army? Are you intending to drift across the sea for the rest of your life, never to come close to shore ever again?”

“It is needless for you to worry about this,” Garcia waved towards the guards. “In comparison, the Church’s Army is nowadays also attacking the walls of the Wolfsheart Kingdom, and in this way turning Hermes into an undefended city. This should be much more important for you to think about this than about my personal destiny. I might be unable to set foot on the land of the New Holy City. However, I should at least be able to reach the ruins of the Old Holy City at the foot of the plateau. You should already have heard that the water of the Styx’s River in Graycastle’s extreme south, it’s easy to light, but hard to extinguish. This time I’ve taken a whole shipload with me.”

One of the personal guards pulled out his dagger, approached the Bishop laying on the ground and cut off two of her fingers.

Heather, however, merely bite her teeth not releasing any shout.

Seeing this, the Queen of Clearwater climbed up the flight of steps, sat on the large throne, used her right hand to support her chin and showed an expression that was full of interest.

... soon three other fingers were cut off, in this way her left hand had now been turned into a bare meat palm which made beads of sweat appear over Heather's forehead.

“Must you do this?” Kabala shook her head, “If you don't want to intimidate the enemy or receive intelligence via torture, this kind of pure torment is unnecessary.”

“Unnecessary?” Garcia laughed coldly, “You should ask her what they do with all the witches who fall into the Church's hands? But I guess you wouldn't be interested in knowing this.”

“Hahaha...” At that time, Heater, having already lost all her fingers, suddenly began to laugh, “You're simply unable to understand the greatness of the Church. And clearly, you will never understand how important the Holy City actually is. Ignorance is your lifelong companion, even on the eve of your destructing, you will still be unaware of it! , Hermes will let you see what it means to wield true power – besides destruction, there is no other end for people who go against the Church!”

“Is that so...” Garcia raised her legs and smiled. “Then I will have to wait and see, won’t I?”

Until the Archbishop had died, she never cried out any plea for mercy. However, what surprised Ryan even more, was that she had never cried for God either, or begged for his salvation. At the end, when Heather was already losing her consciousness due to the excessive loss of blood, her expression turned from cold and detached to dreadful. As if she wasn’t suffering any punishment, but was rather standing at the sideline and looking at a farce which had nothing to do with her – within her two eyes, Ryan thought he could already see his own doomed future.

Feeling this kind of indescribable oppressing feeling, almost made him feel breathless.

“Chop off her head and hang it over the church’s door.” After confirming the Bishop’s death, Garcia gave an order. She then looked to Ryan, “Now, we can begin to talk about the next step.”

“Yes, His Majesty,” he forcefully suppressed the discomfort within his chest. “Do you intend to attack Hermes?”

“Yes, but we won’t dispatch our whole army.” She spread out a portable leather map, “Taking with it the least required amount of sailors and the Eastern Region’s slaves, the Black Sail Fleet will follow the River westwards, and go to the Old Holy City. However, we will instead directly go south, crossing Eternal Winter’s border, with Wolfsheart Kingdom’s capital as our destination”.

“Wolfs... heart?” Ryan got started.

“Wolf King Woolf and I have already reached an agreement,” Garcia explained, “In case I help him ward off the Church, he will give me a hand in taking over the whole Kingdom of Eternal Winter. So if the Church does not recall their troops, the ships loaded with fierce Snow Powder and Styx river-water will turn the Old Holy City into a sea of flames – unlike the New Holy City, which is surrounded by high city walls, the old city does not have any walls. Thus, without enough manpower, they won’t be able to stop the slaves’ attack from all directions.”

“However if they retreat, the western border of the Wolfsheart Kingdom will be able to receive breathing room, and with the joined border of the two countries, we will also be able to work together against the Church in the future!”

“Indeed,” the Queen of Clearwater nodded, “We will also be able to obtain a firm grip over Endless Winter for ourselves.”

Chapter 250 - End Of Midsummer

Seeing that the second month of summer was coming to an end, Border Town was on the verge of greeting summer's final month, which was also the hottest of all of the months, all the more leaving Roland in a mood where he didn't wish to leave the castle.

Aside from using it to make gunpowder, the rest of the saltpeter brought in by Margaret had been used to lower the room's temperature – nowadays a bucket of saltpeter with a kettle soaking in it had been arranged within almost all of the castle's rooms. This way, not only were they able to show the effects of endothermic cooling, but it also allowed them some ice water which they could drink to quench their thirst. Only in this way was he able to keep from sweating as he sat in the office each day.

With the exception of Anna, he had called all of the other witches to stop their work. Outside of their daily practice and learning, they were mainly gathered in the hall of the first floor, either chatting or comparing their skills in Gwent against one another, displaying an appearance that was of both harmony and happiness. However, Anna... It wasn't that Roland didn't want her to rest, it was rather that she didn't hate the heat at all. Compared to holding ingots which were still red from the fire directly in her hands, the hot temperature of summer was nothing to her. Even when standing next to the fireside and producing steel for the whole afternoon, she did not even shed one drop of sweat.

In order to reward Anna for her hard work, Roland had recently specially created some ice cream desserts. For example, the later generation classical types of ice cream – made from stirring a mixture of egg yolk, butter, milk and syrup. Which were then

cooled off once more by using saltpeter. Anna was exceptionally fond of this soft and fragrant ice-cold snack, every time he saw her take a small bite of ice cream, her lake-blue eyes would turn into stitches, making him feel very pleased.

Moreover, looking over the monthly reports sent by the City Hall was also a joyous pleasure of his.

By now, Border Town's population had once more doubled, almost reaching a total of 18'000 people. On top of that, with the addition of Longsong Stronghold's monthly "transferred" batch of serfs, breaking through the 20'000 mark next year would not be a problem for him. Leaving out the size of the territory of Border Town or the number of villages and towns belonging to it, this scale could almost be compared with the size of Redwater City, the city of Valencia, and King's City.

However, something which was somewhat regrettable was that even though the population might have grown a lot, the quality of it hadn't improved by much. At present, there were still more than 1000 of Border Town's native inhabitants who had yet to receive an education. Furthermore, it would still require one year before they could obtain the capacity needed to graduate without a hitch – although Karl's previously opened college had fostered a batch of talented students in advance, their number were still less than one hundred, which when compared with the general population, seemed insignificant.

Perhaps I should first carry out an education program for the Eastern refugees, and not start with the steps of building enough living quarters, Roland thought, after all, receiving the education

earlier would only bring benefits and not cause any harm.

The current development of the town's factories was also excellent.

After more than half a year of construction, the industrial park now had three operating factories: there were two steam engine production plants and a bullet processing plant. The number of workers in the first plant had also expanded from the 10 blacksmiths at its opening to the 100 people it now had. The follow-up workers were mainly natives – which was also something he wanted to see, a group of apprentices would gradually grow into craftsmen, who would then provided the foundation needed to raise the next group of apprentices.

The workers of the second plant were the artisans belonging to the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan. Just during this one month, they had already grasped a roughly understanding of the machine tool's usage, even though their yield was still quite bad, but compared with the blacksmith of the first plant, the first-month performance of these craftsmen was obviously better. According to the previously signed contract, all of their produced steam engines were owned by Roland. With those two factories Border Town could now manufacture almost eight to ten steam engines per month, which was also the town's primary means of income.

As for the bullets factory, after its establishment, it had been directly handed over to the First Army, who not only placed a lookout post at its entrance, but also arranged for patrols all around the factory, and even the production was the responsibility of the soldiers. After a week of trial operation, nowadays, they had

already begun the mass production of a new generation of bullets.

Roland plan for the assembly line couldn't achieve full mechanical production, no matter if it were the primer, gunpowder or warheads, they all needed manpower for the filling compaction. The main processing tools were the two mechanical stamping machines. The one could press the thin copper pieces previously cut by Anna into the shape of the cartridge case, while the second was used to push the primer towards the bottom.

The soldiers only needed to place the mercury fulminate evenly between two thin pieces of paper, glue the edges of the two papers together, press the primer towards the lower part of the cartridge then finally place the cartridge with the primer's end at the bottom into the ring-shaped ammunition case, before the entire process was complete. As for the process of loading and compacting the black powder and putting on the projectile, it was still done in exactly the same way as the previous practice.

There were only a small number of people working in the factory around forty people, which could still almost produce more than 500 bullets every day. For the future, Roland intended on turning these forty people into his full-time processing personnel to maintain the standard operation of the bullet production factory.

The next step on Roland's to-do list was to open a soap factory, and a perfume factory – the former would play a very important part in the military industry, while the later might be able to open up a new income channel for the town. As for the bicycle factory, its opening could still be delayed, it would be opened early enough as long as it went into full production by the time the Kingdom

Avenue was finished.

“Your Highness,” Nightingale said, pushing open the doorway, “Maggie and Lightning are here.”

Both girls run over from Nightingale’s side, and after stopping in front of the desk, they pointedly asked. “Were you looking for us?”

“Tomorrow is the start of the final month of summer,” Roland pulled his formerly written reply to Tilly out of the drawer and placed it in front of Maggie, “When you return to the Fjord, remember to help me hand this over to Tilly.”

“Ah...” For a moment Maggie froze, only able to look at the message with blinking eyes, before she took the envelope and carefully placed it into her personal bag, “No problem, goo!”

Seeing an expression of sudden understanding from the other side, Roland feared that she had already forgotten the important matter of her monthly reports. Restraining the smile within his heart, he thought of the town’s charm which seemed to be really powerful.

“I have entirely forgotten that tomorrow is the beginning of a new month,” Lightning tapped against her forehead. “Does it mean that we will be unable to see each other for a long time?”

“Tilly’s plan to sweep the Fjords clean of the Church had delayed my plan to come back last time, this time I will be back as soon as

possible,” Maggie shook her white hair that was about to reach the ground, “Wait for me to come back to explore the eagle nest together... Goo!”

“I got it,” the other little girl said, curling her lips, “It’s a promise.”

“You have your own mission,” Roland spread out a map of the region south of the town. “This is the map you had previously drawn, do you still remember the location of the shoal near the mountains?”

“I remember,” Lightning pointed at a place on the map, “Probably around this area.”

“Well, you will fly back to it again, and this time you will take Maggie along. Then you will place flags on both sides of the shallow beach and the junction of the mountains, and also mark them on the map,” Roland ordered, then looked towards Maggie, “If Tilly agrees to send the witches, you will lead the sailboat to this shoal, and I will welcome you at the top of the mountain.

“Send witches?” Lightning asked curiously, “Could it be that there will be new sisters coming to Border Town?”

“I do not know yet,” Roland said, a smile on his face. “It all depends on Tilly’s answer... but I have a feeling that she will agree to it.”

Chapter 251 - Flying Again

On the second day after Maggie's departure, Roland, with the witches assistance, began assembling and installing a new generation of hot air balloons out in the courtyard.

As a result of the expansion of the back garden and the witch dormitory, Leaves had already moved her plants to the front courtyard. With all of the vines covering the walls and the wooden frames along the corridors, it gave quite a prehistoric forest-type of feeling. And because of this, it naturally also offered an excellent shield against the sun, allowing the sunshine to only fall through the small gaps in the dense leaf canopy above, only leaving scattered light spots behind on the ground.

Roland gave the witches a stack of white paper, and let them spread it out into a large painting paper, then asked Soraya to draw the lightest of sky-blue coating on top of it. Compared to the first hot air balloon, which used a combination of bovine intestinal membrane and canvas, the new generation which purely relied on the coating method was much lighter. Furthermore, it also offered excellent toughness and had no suture lines, so that they didn't need to fear that it would break apart in mid-air.

"I've heard from Lightning, that there might be some witches coming from the Fjords?" Wendy asked in curiosity.

"That might be so, if everything goes well," Roland once more explained about the content of his reply to the 5th Princess, "But to know the actual situation we still have to wait for Tilly Wimbledon's answer."

“It seems that Ashes has succeeded,” Wendy mused, “They were actually able to gather so many witches on Sleeping Island.”

“Yeah, I’m afraid that Tilly had already started to plan the migration more than one or two years ago,” Roland said and spread out his hands. “She had already sent people to secretly contact the witches long ago and not just within Graycastle, but also from all of the other three kingdoms. Your Witch Cooperation Association should also have received an invitation. I guess that’s also the reason why even after we spread the rumor of a safe haven for such a long time, no witches have come knocking at our door – we were just a step slower than Tilly.”

“Cara has never mentioned this to us,” Wendy rubbed her shoulders.

“If she had told you about Tilly’s invitation, you might have never wanted to keep on looking for the Holy Mountain, isn’t that right?”

“That is possible, but only by doing it that way, were we able to meet in Border Town,” she shook her head while smiling, “Therefore, that she didn’t mention it... wasn’t bad.”

“I also think that it was pretty good,” Lightning raised her hand.

“Tsk, we can’t say for sure that going to the Fjords wouldn’t have been better,” Lily curled her lips, “After all, there are only witches there, so they don’t need to pay special attention when stepping

out of the house, like here in Border Town.”

“It has already become much better than before,” Anna said earnestly, “In the past I didn’t even dare to go out at all.”

“Yes, some people are simply like this. Last time, Ashes clearly wanted to flatly reject our invitation, but she still put on an act.” Mystery Moon then mumbled to herself, “Also saying that she wasn’t a traitor!”

“You...” Lily opened her eyes wide, “Fool!”

“Traitor!”

The other witches couldn’t help themselves from laughing.

“I also think the same,” Roland’s heart was suddenly filled with a sense of accomplishment. Even though the 5th Princess was smarter and more quick-witted than he was, and he might also not be as powerful or resolute as Timothy and Garcia were, he could at least provide these witches with a free-spirited and comfortable living environment, and at the same time give his people a better life.

“This hot air balloon... I fear it might become several times larger than the previous one,” Nightingale interrupted while looking at the size Soraya had already managed to coat. “Are you intending to use it to transport the witches?”

Roland nodded, “The only way to avoid the usage of any harbor city, is by directly traveling across the sea to the south of Border Town. Moreover, apart from greeting and sending off our new visitors, it can also be considered as a new attempt at flight.”

After the coating had been applied on both sides, it became a double-layered material, with a width and length of nearly six meters. If it had been made out of plain canvas or linen, it would be difficult to single-handedly drag it over, but since it was only made out of the light coating, its weight managed to only equal the weight of a stack of papers. By combining more than a dozen of pieces like these together, and by protecting the seams with an additional protective layer, it became a staggeringly giant airbag.

Roland also wanted to test the soldering capability of Soraya’s coating. The “thick tree bark” painting she had drawn on the table when she had used her new ability for the first time still remained fresh within his mind. They had both been so firmly bonded together, that when they tried to grab the tree bark and pull it upwards, the whole square table had also been lifted up.

So in the end what he really wanted to find out was whether it was possible for the coating to glue the pieces of paper together into an inseparable whole. And if it could do that, it would then be able to maintain the massive airbag shape and also keep its airtight properties.

At present, instead of imitating a hydrogen balloon, which could be controlled by anyone he still needed to rely on Anna to inflate the hot air balloon. But since he already had a DC motor, and could also produce hydrogen by electrolyzing water, the time until the

arrival of the historically famous airship, “Zeppelin”, wouldn’t be too far into the future. As long as he found a suitable light material to make the skeleton with, creating this kind of huge monster which could fly at a height of two to three thousand meters and had almost no natural enemies would have a lot less technical difficulties than other aircrafts did.

Although the hit rate at which bombs were thrown from a high altitude was very low, they still weren’t something that the enemy would be able to withstand. Leaving them with no other choice than to take a beating, with not even the slightest possibility of hitting back – so, as long as they circled over the enemy’s territory each day, Roland thought that there would not be any opponent who would not collapse under the Zeppelin’s might.

Imagining the picture of their future battle against the Holy City of the Church, he saw four or five of these aircrafts hovering side-by-side in the air, dropping bombs on them like rain, heavy gunship bombardments coming from the river channels towards the enemy city’s gate and stronghold, and added to this were all of the infantry, armed with firearms, fighting from the rear. Having the three armed services, the Army, Navy, and Air Force fight together as one, even just imagining this already made him become somewhat excited.

“Your Highness, what are you laughing so foolishly for?” Anna sighed and reached out with her hand to cover the corner of her mouth which she was unable to keep from jerking into a smile.

“I presume he is being delusional, thinking about the new witches,” Lily rolled her eyes, “Men...”

After the lower part of the airbag was connected using hemp ropes, towards a large vine gondola, the founding of the new generation of Hot Air Balloon was successfully completed. Compared with the first generation, its volume was close to four times as large, and the number of people it could accommodate had also expanded to more than ten. Furthermore, the basket also came with an awning which would shield the passengers from the sunlight. Of course, to provide Anna with a place to add heat to the balloon they had also left a hole within the awning.

Roland named the balloon as 'Cloud Gazer', and after completing the heavy load test at an open space in the courtyard, it was finally time for the first navigation test on the following day. Beside Anna, the other members of the test flight's crew were Wendy, and five other witches, as well as the Prince himself.

The whole process of navigating within the air went smoothly, the witches floating in the air could constantly chatter, and sighing as they looked out at the spectacular scenery from a bird's eye point-of-view – compared with last time's observation from a fixed point, this time they were always moving, becoming a sightseeing tour which evoked even more interest in them. With Wendy constantly providing wind, Cloud Gazer advanced further South, arriving at the mountain ridge at noon, and after crossing over the flag inserted at the hilltop, it ultimately came to hover above the shoreline.

After flying in a circle along the coastline, the entire group of people on board of Cloud Gazer returned to the castle. During the flight, Roland noticed that Wendy, who was responsible for controlling the direction of the flight would occasionally beat her

shoulders, and also appeared to be very exhausted.

He had heard that woman with big chests easily suffered under shoulder pains and that it could be solved with the use of a certain close-fitting type of underwear. Although he didn't know if this was true or not, giving it a try couldn't be wrong. Moreover, along with becoming older, Anna's body was also gradually developing, so Roland decided to make a small gift for the adult witches.

Chapter 252 - New Round Of Purchases

As the Lord of the Western Region, Roland naturally didn't need to do the job by himself, he merely had to draw a rough outline on a piece of paper, and could then recruit a tailor and make clear what he wanted to create.

Although he had never come in contact with a bra with his own hands, with all the different advertisements, television programs, and movies he had actually already seen plenty of them before, so he could still design some of them in accordance with their different styles. In the end, he chose to create the most frequently seen shoulder strap type, which fastened at the back. To make it, he decided to use three copper hooks, which allowed for the wearer to choose a level of relaxation that was within a fixed range.

Since this kind of close-fitting clothing needed to satisfactorily bind the chest, Roland decided to call for the maids in the castle to be measured by the tailor. Because of the tailor's wealth of experience, from so many years of cutting out and tailoring clothes, she was immediately able to understand the function of a bra after hearing the Prince's explanation. In the end, together with the actual measurement results, the bra's sizes had been divided into several grades, and each grade could be adjusted to a certain extent.

In fact, within this era, the prototype for the bra had long since made its appearance – it was the skintight corset. However, the corset wasn't developed in order to let woman feel more comfortable, rather it was used to tighten up their waistline as much as possible, while at the same time also pushing up the

bosom, so that the body would form into an hourglass-like figure. Those gorgeous aristocratic dresses had all been tailored in accordance with the form of a small waist, so without the aid of a skintight corset, Roland was afraid that those dresses with their extremely thin waist would be very difficult for the average woman to wear. Furthermore, when the waist was constricted too much, it would also make for a very uncomfortable experience, and in serious cases could even affect the blood circulation which in turn could lead to fainting.

While the bra, in addition to supporting the chest, also fixed the bosom and lessen its shaking, making it even more comfortable for the woman to wear it daily.

Just two days later, the old tailor had already cut out twenty bras. For the material, Roland had provided her with silk and first-rate cotton; both were pleasing to the eye and breathable, and the workmanship was also exceptionally intricate.

But before Roland was even able to send the gift over to the witches, the caravan from King's City had once again arrived in Border Town.

Compared to the previous month, not only was the fleet too late, but its size was also far smaller than last time, even so much as to give a deserted feeling when they came to dock in Border Town's expanded pier.

"Your Highness, and so we meet again," Margaret said with a smile.

“Welcome. Previously, by helping me to transport the refugees I’d put you through a lot of trouble,” Roland said and looking at the fleet on the river bank, “This times, it seems there are a lot fewer sailboats.”

“That’s because... of some unexpected accidents,” she wiped the sweat from her forehead. “If you do not mind, could we go to the reception hall to talk about this, it is much too hot out here.”

“I also feel the same,” Hogg mumbled to himself. “I’m a man from Graycastle through and through, this awful weather is killing me. If it weren’t for the purpose of receiving the first steamer, I would not want to even leave the house right now.”

Roland nodded and the entire group of people all returned to the castle. Walking into the hall, the cold air from inside was the first thing to fill their lungs, and after he had taken a deep breath Hogg said in relief, “Thank God for the existence of such a wonderful thing... if I hadn’t seen its course of production with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have been able to believe that it had been made from manure. Oh, there is even ice water! Your Highness, may I –?”

“Of course,” Roland signaled that he should go ahead, and then went to sit at the Lord’s seat, to start his talk with the merchant woman, “With this done, what was the accident which led to this month’s sharp decline of saltpeter?”

In accordance with the contract, she had to provide Border Town with three ships of saltpeter each month, but this time, only one

ship had been loaded with saltpeter.

“It is because of King’s City Alchemy Association, they have recently purchased all the available saltpeter. Furthermore, they only offer to buy at a low price, but since they have the support of Prime Minister Marquis Wyke, no one has the possibility of resisting. Therefore this isn’t really a simple business transaction. Instead, the merchants think that it would be bad if they did not sell.” Margaret said, “I guess that the order was given by Timothy himself, after all, he is practically blowing steam from his nose out of anger.

“Timothy?” Rowland asked puzzled, “Isn’t he still marching to the South?”

“That’s right,” she nodded. “It seems that Theo has already told you this news. I had heard when he had left King’s City he also brought many men and horses as well as fully loaded military supply wagons with him, their goal must probably be to go and find some trouble for Garcia in the South. Shortly after they had left King’s City, the Alchemy Association had also began to buy all of the saltpeter.”

On hearing of this matter, Roland was even more assured that sending Theo to King’s City was indeed very fruitful. At the beginning, he had only received the message that Timothy was gathering the rats, so in order to guard against the other side’s sudden invasion, he had specifically asked Petrov to strengthen the defenses of Longsong Stronghold. But when Roland received the next secret letter sent by his personal guard, he could finally feel relieved – this time Timothy had headed straight to the South.

Apparently, this recruiting hadn't been meant to go against him.

Regarding the use of the rats, Roland and Theo had basically the same opinion. Which was, since their discipline was even worse than that of the commoners and serfs, they wouldn't be suitable for use in direct combat. So, the only way to use this group of people would be the same as the last time. First make them become addicted to drugs, and then force them to attack and kill the enemy. It seems that his counterpart was depending on the tactic of repeatedly using armies of cannon fodder, which, with taking into regard that he was ruling over 2/3 of Graycastle, was contrary to what one might expect to be a safe strategy.

But why did the Alchemy Association suddenly begin to acquiring a lot of saltpeter? Snow Powder was originally one of their products, but with its huge error rate, it could only be used for salutes during rituals. Could it be, that nowadays, after the appearance of the correct formula for gunpowder, they intended on immediately starting mass production, or were they trying to determine the optimal mix ratio through a large number lot of experiments?

Roland shook his head, trying to get rid of the doubt within his mind, he guessed that it wouldn't have too great of an impact. After all, the industrial production of three acids and two sodas would soon begin, which would allow allowing him to step onto the path of producing an even more advanced form of gunpowder.

“Then does it mean that you can also not guarantee next month saltpeter supply of three ships?”

“This... I don’t know,” also Margaret looked a bit embarrassed but she still bluntly said, “I already spent a lot of time and effort to bring this one ship into the Western Territory, I had to purchase it from Silver City. And now that we have to face the heat of summer, the demand for saltpeter is enormous, so I’m not sure of how much I can buy. However, if it is any other season, I can guarantee the supply of the three ships.”

“I understand,” Roland took a sip of ice water, “Then try to get as much as possible next month, there is no need for you to try to force it. I also still have some goods that I want to purchase from you.”

“Oh?” Margaret sighed in relief, “What is it? Ore?”

“Washing stones used for washing laundry,” he replied, “They are muddy white and look like a wafer or pillar, but when soaked in water they will give off a soapy feeling, those things aren’t uncommon in the capital’s inns.”

“Sure enough, it’s ore,” said the merchant, smiling helplessly, “You have a big mine in your territory, yet all the goods you acquire are still minerals, that’s really something that’s hard for people to understand. Well, it’s a really common thing, so the price shouldn’t be too high, what are you planning to do with it?”

“Naturally it will be used to make it easier to wash clothes,” Roland smiled.

Washing stones were something he had discovered in the

memories of the former 4th Prince, its innate character was a natural alkali, and its main component was sodium bicarbonate. It had a strong decontaminating effect, and when used together with plant ash and pancreas it was one of three outstanding cleaning tools used in the ancient times. In the absence of an ion exchange membrane, the efficiency of using the electrolysis of salt water to collect sodium hydroxide was extremely low. Furthermore, it wasn't possible to purchase edible salt at the price of a cabbage either. Because of this, he planned to buy natural soda and make caustic soda. And by the time he had a sufficient amount of caustic soda he could start the large-scale manufacturing of soap... as well as one of soap's by-products, glycerin."

Chapter 253 - Hot Air Balloon Trade

“Your Royal Highness, I would like to ask you, when we stepped through the door,” after drinking all the iced water in the bucket, Hogg’s appearance had finally recovered, “The painting drawn in the hall... I am afraid that is something that is impossible for the average person to draw, isn’t it? No matter whether it is the degree of lifelike or the view from high up in the air.” He lowered his voice and asked, “Is this the work of a witch?”

Roland looked over at Margaret only to see the latter nodding, “Your Highness, please rest assured, Hogg is my old friend for many years. He is also not someone who is malicious towards witches.”

“You guessed it. It really is a witch who made the painting.” After the hot air balloon tour to the beach from two days ago, Roland had wanted to preserve the view of the beautiful scene he had seen, plus the former hall’s decoration was actually simple and crude, without any paintings, so he had asked Soraya to turn the wall behind the Lord’s seat into a grand mural. With the scenic wall at the back, the hall’s style had instantly been upgraded by several grades.

“I knew it,” Hogg sighed. “Although they are propagated as the devil’s minions, those strange abilities they possess are indeed enviable. It is impossible for ordinary people to fly into the air and draw such an exquisite mural beyond compare afterward.”

“Only the second half of your sentence is correct,” Roland shook his head, “Ordinary people, even if they don’t rely on magic, can

also fly. They can even fly higher than an eagle and fly faster than the swift.”

“You have a good sense of humor,” Hogg laughed out loud, “Only if we have a pair of wings, and also become lighter than the birds.”

Margaret however, sounded startled as she asked, “Really?”

“Of course,” the Prince said confidently, “And I can prove it to you.”

Letting the merchants receive the knowledge and experience about his various types of inventions, wouldn't only promote their relationship, it would also open up a new effective way for them to trade – it was the same for everything else, from the mugs to the liquor, whether he was able to sell it or not was another matter. Anyway, the caravan would be staying in town for several days, and after their regular trading, the negotiation would also be finalized. The rest of their time was typically filled with drinking and being merry making. Furthermore, Anna was also very interested in taking a trip in the hot air balloon, so by giving her a possibility to rest for a moment from her busy work, it could be seen as an action which fulfilled multiple purposes.

Soon, Cloud Gazer was once more inflated, and all the witches who couldn't ride with the balloon last time had gathered. Lucia even shyly asked if her younger sister could also go up and take a look, which Roland had immediately agreed to.

As the balloon that was carrying everyone began to slowly rise,

Margaret covered her mouth in astonishment, while Hogg grabbed hold of the edge of the basket, not knowing whether he should be excited or scared. Since Bell's size was too small, it was impossible for her to see the scenery outside of the basket. Without any better option, Lucia had to hold her up and permitted for her to ride on her shoulders, while gingerly stepping close to the edge of the basket and repeatedly warning her to not fiddle around too much. As the navigator and the rescuer, Lightning continually circled around the hot air balloon, only stopping from time to time to pull a face at Bell.

After the hot air balloon circled along the southern coastline one more time, their airborne sightseeing trip had come to its end.

Back at the castle, Hogg's legs were still trembling, stammering he said, "I would have never thought, that looking down from up in the sky would be this frightening, I felt like I was always falling down.

"After flying for a few times it will be okay," Roland laughed. "Leaving with your feet from the ground for the first time will always create such an illusion. It is the same for a person who had never gone out to sea, they will also start to vomit due to the sea's up and down motion.

"You spoke the truth," Margaret exclaimed in admiration, "Today, the scenery I saw was indeed inconceivable, looking from the sky to the edge of the sea, it actually resembled a blue arc."

“But Your Royal Highness, I do not seem to be wrong,” Hogg drank some iced liquor, “Even though we ordinary people were able to fly in the sky, but this was still a witch’s ability. If it weren’t for them, this big guy would never be able to fly.”

“No, old friend,” Even before Roland had the chance to answer, Margaret had already begun to speak, “Don’t tell me you haven’t realized it? Miss Anna had been merely releasing her flame, nothing more. I also specifically asked Lightning, she said that as long as enough heat is poured into the airbag, Cloud Gazer will rise up into the sky. The flame is not a witch’s privilege, Your Royal Highness, am I right?”

She once more proved why she was able to establish herself as a Fjord ocean merchant in King’s City, no matter if it was her perception, or her intelligence, they were both exceptional. Roland smiled and nodded, “Hot air will rises, while cold air will sink, that’s also the reason why it is called a hot air balloon.”

“Really, would using a brazier be hot enough?” Hogg asked disbelievingly.

“That won’t do, because if you want to let the balloon float in the sky, you have to supply it with heat the entire time. Furthermore, wood itself is already very heavy, so you can’t take it with you without end, because of this, the problem needs to be solved in a special way.”

“Can you achieve it?” Margaret asked impatiently.

“Well... I should be able to,” after thinking for a while, Roland continued, “But there are still some troubles.”

“That would be truly wonderful,” Margaret answered immediately. “I hope that I will be able to purchase four to five hot air balloons, they don’t need to be so big, it would already be enough if they can carry one person.”

“Do you want to put it on your ships?” Hogg asked.

“Well, the mast cannot reach an unlimited height, but a hot air balloon can. It can go as high as the length of the rope connected it. Moreover, if it is connected to the mast, it also won’t drift away with the wind. So, by using a hot air balloon as a lookout, they should be able to detect nearing pirate ship much earlier. Regarding the sea trade, besides the unpredictable storms and tsunamis, the biggest harm to our merchant fleets comes from pirates.”

“But I fear that it is unlikely that the construction cost will be low,” Roland calculated it within his mind, “I estimate that it will require more than one thousand gold royals.”

In case they didn’t use a witch to heat the air, the hot air balloon would need to use gas as fuel, and the most easily obtainable fuel would be coal gas. Unfortunately, Graycastle’s coal mines were located at the Cold-Wind Mountain Range, which was just too far away from Border Town. According to the transportation conditions, it would be impossible to transport it over. Turning the hot-air balloon into a hydrogen balloon would be much easier to achieve, but he had still to solve the problem of the gas tank – if it

couldn't be used unobstructed, then it wouldn't be of any practical value.

“One thousand gold royals apiece, was it?” Margaret said then made a counter-offer, “If you really are able to make this, I can guarantee that all the caravans from the Fjords will buy at least one or two of them.”

“This time Crescent Moon Bay Caravan hadn't come along. Otherwise I'm certain you would have received your next huge order,” Hogg grasped the liquor cup and drained it in one gulp. “I, however, won't need such a balloon, even though they seem very magical, they don't have any use for my mines in Silver City. I just want to get my steam engines as soon as possible.”

Hearing Margaret accepting his price made Roland pleased beyond his expectations. The one thousand gold royals were the price he got after increasing the estimated production costs by five times. He had never expected that the other party was able to accept a price twice the price of a steam engine. But when he thought about it again, a sea faring ship carrying all kinds of goods would probably be worth much more than this price, not to mention saving the entire merchant fleet and the lives of the ship's crew, so long as they could avoid being looted by pirates, the deal would still be cost-effective for ocean traders.

Also, the thousand gold royals wouldn't be the end of the deal, whether it was hydrogen or coal gas, they were both consumables. If they were used up, they would eventually need to come back to Border Town for a refill, which would then yield an additional revenue... Of course, in case they acquired the gas canisters in large

quantity, giving them a discount or present them with several inflations for free could be considered. In this regards, he could use the [4S](#) car shops and [CPC](#) and [CNPC](#) as an example and imitate them.

Roland pretended to hesitate for a moment before he finally nodding, “In that case, I think we have reached a deal.”

In China, authorized car dealership are called 4S car shops. The 4S represents Sale, Sparepart, Service and Survey. 整車銷售(Sale)、零配件(Sparepart)、售後服務(Service)、信息反饋(Survey). In most cases, brand-name new cars can be purchased only from 4S shops. For new cars in high demand, a high premium is added for instant delivery or just placing an order. The profit of car dealers in China is quite high comparing to the rest of the world, in most cases 10%. This is supposedly due to the ‘non-transparent invoice price’ as announced by manufactures and to the premiums they charge for quick delivery. Due to the lack of knowledge for most customers, dealers can sell add-ons at much higher prices than the aftermarket. [There is no regulation by either the government or associations.](#)

Chapter 254 - Alliance

The Fjord's weather was very strange. Yesterday had been a sunny, cloudless day, with an endlessly blue sky. But the sky was gloomy today, the wind was blowing and the thunder rolling, looking like a massive rainstorm was imminent.

Ashes held down her hair to prevent it from fluttering about wildly in the wind then stepped into Tilly's home only to discover that there was a fat pigeon sitting on Tilly's shoulder.

“Maggie?”

“Goo!” The pigeon raised its head, its eyes turned bright, it opened its wings and immediately threw itself at the doorway, only to gently be blocked by Ashes hand, “Turn into your human form so that we can talk.”

“Woo... Goo,” With fluttering wings, Maggie landed on the floor, shedding her feathers to reveal her original appearance. She opened her mouth and unhappily asked, “Do you have a hatred for pigeons?”

“I've always felt that a bird that can speak is way too strange,” Ashes said laughingly and pulled up the girl that was sitting up from the ground, “At what time have you come back?”

“Just a moment ago, I was afraid that I would get caught up by the storm, my wing almost ended up broken,” she patted her chest. “Fortunately, I was able to reach Sleeping Island before the rain

began falling.”

“Did you fly back... like this?” Ashes tapped her on the forehead, “Why didn’t you just turn into a swallow wouldn’t that have been much faster?”

“Oh...” Maggie’s eyes became wide, as if she had suddenly only just realized something, “I forgot, goo.”

Tilly couldn’t help but laugh, she then put down the letter in her hand and said, “I’m putting you through a lot of trouble. I already know about the news from that area, so for now, you can should go and look for Lotus or Molly and play with them, I will think about a good reply and notify you later.”

“Good, goo!” Maggie saluted and then hopped as she left the room.

“What did Roland Wimbledon have to say?” Waiting until the both of them were the only one left in the room, Ashes went over to Tilly and sat beside her on the woven mat. There, on the ground in front of them a map was spread out. Looking closely, she discovered that it depicted the terrain surrounding Border Town.

“This is his letter,” Tilly handed her a piece of paper, “I have to say, the witches he picked are indeed... quite special...”

Ashes quickly finished reading the letter given to her, unable to keep the frown on her forehead she asked “He actually chose

Sylvie? Does he simply do not care about exposing his identity?”

“I don’t know,” Tilly said, not expressing her opinion, “Perhaps my summary about their abilities was too vague, so he was unable to do an in-depth investigation? Or it could be that he simply does not care if his identity is exposed to us, and might be trying to show his sincerity in cooperating? Of course, there is still another possibility...”

“He really could be your older brother,” Ashes finished her sentence, “And because of this he doesn’t care at all about Sylvie’s ability.”

“But this possibility is next to nothing,” she laughed at herself, “Who would know better than I the kind of person my older brother is? If he was indeed Roland Wimbledon, he would never chose to go against the Church in order to protect the witches. From young to old, the thing he has always been best at was with escaping. No matter what challenges or difficulties he was facing ... Even when the king sent him to Border Town, he never went over to meet with “father” or tried raising any form of protest, even if it would only be a symbolic one.”

Ashes raised one eyebrow, “In short, him taking the initiative to pick Sylvie is a good thing for us. In that way, we don’t need to think of an excuse to send him an additional witch, but those other witches... don’t tell me that you really want to agree to send them to him?”

“Why not?”

“Lotus is one of Sleeping Island’s most talented witches. If she is gone, who will build new mud houses or restore our old ones? If you want to create something, or transformation the island’s terrain, not having her ability to remodel the terrain would prove extremely inconvenient. After all, we are currently using less than 30% of Sleeping Islands terrain, there are still many places which can be transformed,” as she said this she raised one finger.

“There is also Honey, she can order the osprey to catch fish for everyone, the reason we can enjoy a variety of delicious fish soups every day is to her credit. As for Candle and Evelyn, sending them away, wouldn’t be such a big problem... In case you cannot refuse his request, can’t we just exchange those two witches for others who aren’t as useful?”

“What is useful, what is useless? By sending them to Border Town, I hope to obtain a new ally, rather than abandon our sisters,” Tilly’s expression turned grave, “No matter what kind of ability they have, by choosing to come to Sleeping Island, all of the witches have become our sisters. If we want to turn Sleeping Island into the home for witches, how could we afford to filter the already small number of witches according to whether their abilities are useful or not?”

Ashes had already seen her exposing this kind of expression during their time in the palace – it was the expression the 5th Princess would show whenever she was outraged, seeing this, Ashes couldn’t help but change her manner of address, “I’m sorry... Your Majesty, I just –“

Tilly sighed and then started unhurriedly, “Moreover, it’s hard to measure the ability of everyone according to some kind of standard. From among the more than one hundred witches, Roland has selected those five witches. Even including Candle and Evelyn, two that you have regarded as useless.

“Can you be really be certain that they are useless? Perhaps through this exchange, we will be able to figure out whether he choose the two by accident, or if he had seen something within them that we were just unable to recognize.” She paused, “No matter what, we are already such a small number of witches, every witch deserves to be fought for. They aren’t tools to be used, to build our new home. We are comrades holding the same goal in our sights, so you must never say such things.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Ashes responded in a meek voice.

At this moment, lightning broke through the clouds, straight over the sea. As if it were a decree given by the Gods, it was immediately followed with an ear-splitting rolling of thunder. And together with the echo of the explosions, the rain also began to fall over Sleeping Island. At first, it fell sparse, but it then quickly turned into a hubbub. And the dense rain soon covered the outside scenery with a layer of fog and rain, even sometimes overshadowing the conversation between the two.

Ashes got up and closed the window, in order to keep the rain from drifting into the room. When she turned turning around, she saw Tilly sway twice, showing a somewhat wan and sallow expression on her face.

“Were you staying up all night?”

“Well,” Tilly called yawn. “All the books we brought back from the ruins were written in the same language. Moreover, I already found some common points, as long as I have enough time, I am sure that I can translate all of them.”

“Yeah, with enough time... now after getting rid of the nagging Church, there will certainly be sufficient time for you, you don’t need to study it all through the night.” Ashes knit her brow, “It could have a tremendous impact on your body.”

“Rest assured, I am a witch, my body won’t collapse so quickly.” The 5th Princess took a deep breath, “Moreover, I have a vague premonition – seeing the scene within the ruins gave me an uneasy feeling, so we have to decipher the contents of these books as soon as possible... Oh, by the way, this time when the witches leave for Border Town, they will also bring one of the books along with them.”

“If even you cannot read it, the possibility that the witches from the Witch Cooperation Association will know it is even worse.”

“Well, we will just have to take a chance,” Tilly said, “I heard that there have been ancient ruins found in the eastern forest. Furthermore, the origin of the Witch Cooperation Association is located in the Sea Wind Region, which is almost right next to the forest. We can’t say for sure whether some of them haven’t already seen this language. And if we can prove that they used the same language, it should mean that all those remains are from the same group of people.”

“Yes, I got it,” Ashes agreed.

“Also, it’s not the case that I blame you for your previous words, some of the words you said are reasonable – but that isn’t related to the part about the significance of their abilities.” Tilly reached out with her hand to stop Ashes from speaking, “I have reached an agreement with the chamber of commerce of the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan. They will start to migrate some ordinary people over to Sleeping Island by next spring. So if Lotus leaves for too long, it would affect the follow-up construction of the island, so before the winter comes I will have them all return to the Fjord.”

Hearing Tilly’s words Ashes said in relief, “Then everything should be fine.”

“But in order to avoid any kind of misunderstanding, I will lead several combat witches over to Border Town and help them to resist the attacks of the demonic beasts during the Months of Demons.” Tilly exposed a sly smile, “When that time comes, are you willing to go together with me?”

Ashes froze for a moment, but in the end had no other option than helplessly replied, “Of course, Your Majesty.”

Chapter 255 - Ways To Welcome

The rainstorm left as quickly as it had come.

Two days after the rainstorm ended, the entire group of people who were leaving, departed. The ship responsible for sending them back to Graycastle was The Charming Beauty.

Sylvie leaned against the edge of the ship's railing, took out a slice of dried beef from a pouch, and held it above her head before shaking it.

“Goo —, Goo —”

A huge seagull which was flying alongside them chirped and dropped from the sky, the air current from its flapping wings caused her to squint her eyes. The meat she'd held in her hand was swallowed in one gulp, and by the time she looked up again, the seagull had already flown to the front of the sailboat, continuing with eagerly leading them across this boundless ocean.

This was something Maggie had asked her to do, because when she turned into a bird, there was no way for her to take out the meat on her own.

Even though her current body looks no different to an ordinary seagull (except for her body size), Sylvie could still see the magic surging within her and could also see her real form. And if she even took an even closer look, she could even also see the process of how the magic came from all direction to finally gather at a

single point, turning into little spots, before it disappeared completely.

“I heard that she cannot only transform into different kind of birds, but that she also receives their corresponding abilities?” Someone behind her clicked his tongue in wonder, “As far as I know, seagulls will never be lost at sea, and are also aware of any incoming storms ahead of time.”

“It is indeed like that, Mr. Captain,” even without looking back, Sylvie knew clearly the man who had come over, “Otherwise we wouldn’t have dared to choose a new route and bypass the Endless Cape, landing in the Southwest of Graycastle.”

Not only did her ability allowed her to observe the flow of magic and detect all magical changes, but it also gave her a vast field of view which didn’t have any gap in its coverage. It gave her the ability to observe everything that was around her at all times – even ignoring the obstacles that were able to block her normal line of sight. Her ability was so powerful that she could even see the lazy sailors who were sleeping under the deck, as well as the shoal of fish that were swimming beneath the bilge.

“Does that place have any ports?” Captain Jack blew out the smoke. “I remember that there were once explorers who’ve traveled to the western side of the Endless Cape, but all they found were cliffs and shoals, there was nothing else.”

“It is even better if there isn’t anything there,” Sylvie said indifferently, “That way, everyone can return on the previous route right away.”

“Isn’t that the same as going on a wild-geese chase?” The captain shook his pipe, “I anticipate that I might see something out of the ordinary on this new route.”

This time, the long journey had been arranged by Lady Tilly so that they could come into contact with other group of witches that were staying at another place, and in that way, to help each other out. In addition to the five chosen witches, Ashes and Molly were also on the ship – but they wouldn’t stay ashore, they had only come along to ensure that this sailing trip would be absolutely safe. Molly’s magical servant could help the ship to withstand any possible storm they might face, while Ashes would make sure that every pirate who dared to fix their attention on their ship and decided to come over would be unable to make their way back.

But Sylvie herself was also carrying another duty on her shoulders. That was, to identify Roland Wimbledon’s true identity for Lady Tilly.

Before the trip, Lady Tilly had given her a detailed account of the story, and also who she should respond to every kind of outcome. In simple terms, she should do her utmost to reach an agreement with the Leader of the Witch Union, in exchange for Roland’s real body. But to be honest, Sylvie had always felt that this mission won’t be so easy for her to complete. In case the Witch Union did not agree and decided to put her and the other four in jail to prevent them from leaking any news, what should she do then?

Sylvie sighed as she looked through the cabin walls at Lotus, Evelyn, and the rest of the group happily playing with the magic

servant.

I hope that the witches from the Witch Union are as friendly as Maggie had said.

After nearly a week of sailing on the sea, Sylvie finally saw Graycastle's coastline.

"We will be arriving soon," Honey shouted as she leaned over the ship's railing, and the rows of swallows, ospreys, and seagulls standing beside her all followed her shout in a loud chorus.

"At last..." Candle said with a meek voice, and carrying a haggard expression, "I feel like I'm almost unable to keep going."

"Child, that is only a temporary phenomenon. As long as you go ashore, you will soon be able to recover your previous strength," Jack said while laughing. He then looked with one eye through the observation mirror. "I've been sailing for so many years, but I've never seen anyone dying because of the ship's shaking."

"Where is Maggie?" Honey Asked.

"She has already traveled to Border Town in advance so that she could contact the witches of the Witch Union," Ashes replied. "I'm sure that they will send someone to pick us up soon."

“Sister Ashes, won’t you come with us?”

“Back at Sleeping Island, Tilly is in even more need of my assistance,” Ashes laughed, “There is no need for you to worry, the witches of the Witch Union will see and treat you as sisters... In case you come across any trouble, it is best to immediately look for Wendy. She will definitely try her best to resolve the problem for you. ”

“Wendy.” Sylvie quietly engraved the name in her mind.

“Oh, that’s right, there is one other thing,” Ashes patted her forehead, “You must remember to always keep a fair distance from Roland Wimbledon, and by no means should you be on your own with him.”

“Why? Isn’t he the older brother of Lady Tilly?” Evelyn asked, puzzled.

“He certainly is,” Ashes stated earnestly, “But that does not prevent him from groping a witch’s buttocks!”

Everyone inhaled a mouthful of cold air in fright.

In the end, the ship docked half a mile away from the shoal. After all, there did not exist any detailed charts of the area, and no one knew how deep the water really was at the edge of the shoal. Yet, going ashore was still quite simple, they didn’t even have to use the beach boat. Instead, Molly let her magic servant wrap up the

five witches and herself, and in that way they floated above the sea surface all the way towards the shore.

The shoal was apparently a part of the mountain, and under the continuous erosion by the seawater, it had slowly become a soft and sandy beach. Not far from them, there stood a towering mountain range which completely separated the coast from Graycastle and the rest of the mainland. It seemed that the mountain ridge was going on endlessly, and the further West they looked, the higher it reached into the sky. At the end of their vision it almost became similar to the giant mountain peaks of the Impassable Mountain Range.

After almost waiting for a whole double-hour, Sylvie noted a strange shadow was coming towards them.

Its volume was colossal, it was almost as huge as The Charming Beauty and with its nearly round shape it was obviously not a natural creature. It was reasonable to assume that such a massive object would also have to be incomparable heavy, but its path of flight was quite smooth, as if it was only floating in the air. Separated by mountains and woods, she couldn't see it very clearly, but it seemed that this thing was always climbing and would be soon above the mountains.

After a while, it finally revealed itself to all of the people in the shelter.

“God, what is that?” Lotus asked in disbelief while looking at the sky with an astonished expression.

“Sister Ashes, have you ever seen something like this?” Evelyn pulled her arm.

“No...” Ashes appeared to be equally surprised, “It is also my first time seeing something like this.”

“It seems that this is the way of style the Witch Union intends to welcome us,” Sylvie sighed.

She had finally discovered a basket hanging beneath the astonishing huge spherical object that was floating in the sky. Furthermore, Maggie and another witch were flying to the left and right of the basket. Then her attention was drawn towards a long yellow canvas that was hanging beneath the basket, on which, gigantic letters were written.

– “Welcome to Border Town.”

Chapter 256 - The Prologue To A New Life

After the basket landed on the ground, a woman who seemed to be around thirty years of age who had red hair that came to her waist climbed out of the basket and greeted them, “Hello everyone. Welcome to Border Town. My name is Wendy.” She then looked to Ashes and showed a charming smile. “You also came.”

Is she the witch Ashes mentioned before? Taking a closer look at the two, Sylvie came to the conclusion that they were already familiar with each other.

“Welcome, you can call me Anna.” A witch with bright eyes appeared in front of Sylvie. Her two blue eyes were as pure as water and also very eye-catching. However, what was even more mind blowing was her magical power – it was tremendous, gave off a profound and resounding feeling and seemed to hardly contain any flaws. It looked like slowly turning cube that was composed of three colors, black, white, and gray, which gathered all of the surrounding magic and twisted it into its orbit.

How astonishing is her power? It was the first-time Sylvie saw magical power that could release such a sense of oppression.

“Hey, my name is Lightning!” the little girl who had been flying beside the basket said. Maggie was sitting on her shoulder.

“Googoo!”

When all the witches of Sleeping Island had been introduced by

Ashes, Wendy smilingly invited everyone to climb aboard the basket.

“This huge air sac above our head is called a hot air balloon, as long as it is provided with hot air, it will be able to take us across the mountains, and towards our destination.” She paused, turned towards Ashes before she asked, “Do you really not want to come along and take a look at Border Town? I think His Highness would also want to see you again.”

“He would not welcome a person who intended to lure away his witches,” she laughed, “I will trouble you to take care of these children.”

“Alright...” Wendy pursed her lips, looking as if she felt regretful. “Rest assured, I will treat them with care.”

“In that case, everyone pay attention” Anna reminded, “Cloud Gazer is about to rise into the sky.”

Sylvie only felt a slight tremble at her feet before the basket had already left the ground. Sticking her head over the edge, she saw Ashes and Molly waving at them. As the hot air balloon rose, the scene on the ground became smaller and smaller, soon turning the two into fingernail-sized spots – no matter what, their new life would soon begin.

It seemed that Wendy had the ability to control the wind and thus the hot air balloon which was under her control flew towards Graycastle and the mainland.

It was Sylvie's first-time overlooking the earth from up in the sky. Even though the earth and rocks couldn't stop her exploration, having such a large field of view available to her was nevertheless a new and odd experience. So when she tried to evoking her magic eye, she never expected the chaotic flood of scenes which came pouring into her mind – the cliffs and mountains hidden in the ocean depths, the underground rivers connected to the sea, the animal bones buried in the earth, as well as the ever-changing subterranean rock strata... Trying to arrange this flood of images Sylvie felt the onset of a splitting headache just as her magical power rapidly dropped. Hurriedly interrupting her magic eye, Sylvie sat on the ground and leaned against the basket wall, slowly trying to catch her breath.

“Are you alright?” Someone asked. Opening her eyes, she discovered that it was Wendy who was asking.

“Well, I'm merely a little... dizzy.”

“After taking a few deep breaths it will soon feel a little better,” Wendy smiled. “Many people feel uncomfortable when they leave the ground for the first time.”

“Thank you, I'm already better,” Sylvie nodded.

Along the way, the atmosphere was much more harmonious than she had initially expected, and it was exactly like Ashes had said, Wendy was full of concern for everyone and she didn't treat them any differently because of them being newcomers. Anna, although

she didn't speak much on her own accord, would still answer in all seriousness whenever someone asked her a question. Lightning who was seemingly a very good friend of Maggie's had a vivacious personality, and together with the fat pigeon would come into the basket from time to time to chat with everyone, not treating them as if they were strangers at all.

With Maggie being the confidant of both sides, the other four witches were gradually able to relax, one after another asking Lightning about the situation in Border Town. Later, the little girl simply hovered beside the basket, and told them stories about the fights against the demonic beasts and invaders, as well as about all of His Highness the Prince's inconceivable invention, giving them one surprise after another.

After a little while, the hot air balloon arrived in the sky over the castle.

Just by looking at its size from high up, the town was really worthy of its name. It was both a small and remote place, with a size that was less than 1/3 of Sleeping Island's. However contrary to what one might expect, it had a large number of townsfolk within. No matter if it was the center square, or the walls or on the river shore, everywhere she looked she could see people gathering together in crowds and groups. Traveling to and fro, they turned into a surging stream.

The hot air balloon directly landed in the castle courtyard and the moment they jumped out of the basket, an unexpected round of explosion spread through the air. Feeling caught off-guard, Sylvie became shocked and froze on the spot. The other four didn't

fare any better, Honey even jumped back into the basket, and asked while only revealing her head halfway: “What happened?”

Wendy couldn't keep herself from laughing, “Do not worry, this is His Highness's gun salute, it is his way to welcome you all to Border Town.”

Passing through the shadowy corridor, they stepped into the castle hall. And that was when Sylvie finally met with Tilly's brother – he was sitting at the end of the hall at the lord's seat, he had an external appearance that was somewhat similar to Her Highness the 5th Princess'. They had the same gray hair, weren't wearing any superfluous pendants on their body and showed a relaxed and natural expression. His facial features still fell short when compared to Tilly's, who's appearance was something that warmed the heart and delighted the eyes. But they shared the same kind of calm temperament which would attract everyone's eye even when they were merely sitting there.

“Welcome to Border Town. I am the Lord of the Western Territory, Roland Wimbledon. I presume that everyone already knows my name.” He stood up and smiled, “Tilly Wimbledon is my younger sister. So, you don't need to feel awkward when living in Border Town, consider it your home the same as you would with Sleeping Island.”

Unable to suppress her curiosity, Sylvie opened her magic eye, only to stare blankly at what she saw.

The expected darkness did not appear, which indicated that the other side wasn't wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation. Moreover,

there also wasn't any trace of magic on his body – how he looked now was the same he looked to her in her normal vision. Neither was there any kind of camouflage on him nor was he being controlled, this could only mean that the man in front of her was indeed Roland himself.

Tilly's countermeasure for the “no clue detectable” situation was merely one sentence: Sending the news back to Sleeping Island.

The words Roland said afterward, Sylvie didn't listen to at all, her head had become a complete mess. In order to accomplish the task given by Lady Tilly, she had thought about the words and expression she should use when negotiating, she had even come up with plans in the case of their imprisonment, never expecting that it would become completely useless. With no better option, let's wait until the end of the month so that Maggie can bring this information back to Sleeping Island and complete the task.

But how is this possible? There is a true aristocrat determined to shelter witches? Even going so far as to become the leader of the Witch Union?

The psychological shock caused Sylvie to fall in a kind of trance, only when His Highness started arranging their rooms for the night did her soul finally return.

“The current situation is roughly like this, by now the witch house is still not completed, so you will have to temporarily live within the castle and share a room with the other witches. Of

course, this should also help you to quickly blend into life here in Border Town.” Then Roland announced, “Tonight, there will be a lavish dinner waiting for you. It will be the official welcoming ceremony to celebrate your arrival in Border Town, I hope everyone will enjoy it”.

Seeing the result of their room arrangements Sylvie breathed out in relieve. In the end, it was arranged that she would live together with Wendy. Looking back at their short contact, Wendy was indeed a good senior who would be easy for her to get along with. However, in addition to Wendy there seemed to be another witch that was living in the room who was called Nightingale.”

Sylvie couldn't help but think, I hope that the other person is also easy to get along with.

Chapter 257 - Mystery

Ever since the five witches from Sleeping Island arrived in Border Town, Roland was in a constant state of excitement. Which meant that even after the end of the banquet, he found it impossible to fall asleep as he lay in his bed. Without any better option available to him, he got up to drink half a cup of white spirit and tried forcing his body to fall asleep.

On the next morrow, when the cicadas in the courtyard all began emitting “ziya” sounds, he had already recovered a clear head. He was full of energy by the time he climbed out of bed, and after a simple washing he immediately headed to the office – at this time the marble white color of dawn appeared in the sky, and sent out the first rays of the morning sun through the window, sprinkling it evenly throughout the room.

Even after looking around for a long time, Roland was still unable to detect the familiar figure of the past. He was used to Nightingale being there, lazily laying on top of the chair whenever he pushed open the door and entered.

With a helpless smile, Roland sat down at the table and removed a notebook from the drawer, then began to plan out the next generation of witch training programs.

First, he would let Wendy and Scroll to help the newcomers become familiar with their new environment that they could start blending in with the community. Furthermore, he also planned to launch a sugar-coated bullet barrage. He would have the visiting witches fully enjoy Border Town’s unique and comfortable

lifestyle. Meaning that it wouldn't even be necessary for them to stay in town for his plan to succeed, even if they went back afterward, as long as they spread the news about the fabulous lifestyle in Border Town it would still be for the better.

By the time the sun was completely hanging over the sky, Nightingale finally came into the office, "Oh? You were actually able to rise so early today? Don't tell me that it's really as Lily said, were you really so impatient for the new witches to arrive that you couldn't wait?"

"What kind of nonsense are you talking about?" Roland smiled as he asked, then put a bag of dried fish on the table, "How did you get along with your new sister last night?"

"Sister?" Nightingale curled her lips, "You can't trust them too much."

"What happened?"

Nightingale reached out with her hand to grab the bag and then turned around to sit on the couch, "The witch named Sylvie, out of the ten sentences she'd spoken, half had been lies. Although they haven't been so grave as to mean that she has some evil intentions towards us there are certainly still a lot of thoughts she is trying to hide."

"Well... that's somewhat understandable," Roland seemed to not care about it, "She probably wanted to see if I was the real Roland Wimbledon or not."

“What?” Nightingale blanked slightly.

“In case one of your close relatives were to suddenly change by a great deal, you would certainly also come to think that they had either been replaced or are become controlled.”

He smiled, “I guess Tilly thinks that one of those possibilities might have happened to me. In King’s City, I was well known for always idling away my days, and being without any learnings or skills. I was someone who bullied the weak and feared the strong. How could such a person so suddenly change as to straighten his back and start sheltering witches?”

In fact, any bad comments that were used to describe the 4th Prince weren’t exaggerations. One of his still existent childhood memories went like this: One time the 4th Prince was playing in the palace, and he ended up accidentally breaking a few crystal-glass jars.

However, to avoid punishment, not only did he push all of the blame on Tilly Wimbledon. No, to complete the forgery of the scene, he even pushed the around six or seven years old girl onto the broken shards of crystal-glass. Having this kind of dark history, wouldn’t it be a wonder instead if the other party’s impression of him was good? It was reasonable that there would be doubt, when the older brother’s nature showed such a dramatic change, that he no longer appeared to be himself, in fact everyone would have liked to go and investigate these changes.

“Hearing you speak like this, I also want to know,” Nightingale asked curiously, “Are you really Roland Wimbledon after all, or not?”

“I’m both, so yes and no,” Roland answered, and spread out his arms.

Nightingale was shocked, “Why does my ability tell me that your sentence is true?”

“Because that’s how it is.” Nightingale’s ability could only detect deliberately told lies, and he didn’t think he was telling her a lie.

“...” Holding her forehead and frowning for a long time, Nightingale finally decided to give up thinking about it, “Well, I will just ask Anna about it later. No matter what, as long as I am familiar with the Roland in front of me, everything is good.”

“Of course, from the moment you knew me, I’ve always been myself.” Roland smiled.

After breakfast, Wendy brought the five witches from Sleeping Island over to his office.

“Good morning, Your Highness.” The five bowed in salute.

“Relax, I am not a person that is very particular about etiquette, you can address me the same way as you talk with Tilly,” Roland said as he waved his hand.

“During the first week I won’t arrange any work for you. Instead, you should use this time to become familiar with the town’s environment and lifestyle. You can freely visit Border Town, nobody will discriminate against you for being witches. They also won’t attempt to arrest you in exchange for money – I have completely eradicated the Church’s force across the whole Western Territory, so this place and Sleeping Island are the same, they are both places of freedom.

“I think that all of you already know of the cause for magic devouring your bodies, so by necessity your practice cannot be abandoned. During the day, there are no restrictions, everything will be alright as long as you do not forget to come back and eat lunch. After dinner, you have primary education classes, which includes learning how to read and write, there will be simple math, and natural knowledge. Tilly may have already told you this, but apart from crossing the day of adulthood, the ability of a witch can be strengthened even further. To do so, it is necessary that you master this knowledge. Every one of you that are interested can come and attend the classes together with the rest of Border Town’s witches.

“Furthermore, each month you will receive one gold royal as remunerations, as well as have the weekends off and you will also be given paid leave – if you don’t understand what this means, you can go and ask Wendy. In short, everyone’s daily life will be the same as that of the Witch Union’s. Sleeping Island is a home for witches, and the same is true for Border Town.” Roland paused, “Our next task will be to test your abilities, Tilly’s description in her letter wasn’t very clear. But displaying you abilities here will be too much of an inconvenience, so let’s first change to a more spacious location.”

“Please wait a moment, Your Royal Highness, there is something I have to give you first,” Sylvie spoke.

“What is it?”

She untied the package in her hands, and placed several yellow parchments together with a letter on to the table, “Lady Tilly discovered these documents within the ruins in the Fjord, she wants to ask if you’re able to understand the letters that the text is written in.”

Puzzled, Roland opened the envelope, it didn’t contain a long letter, so he quickly reached its end, yet the content inside set off monstrous, sky shaking waves within his heart.

A man-made island, set at the bottom of the ocean, after hundreds of years of unpredictable changes due to the rising and falling tides, had an observation mirror that was operable inside, as well as a stone gate constructed within a cliff... all this was simply unfathomable. Why would there exist such an unimaginable remnant in the Fjord? Moreover, the inquiries Tilly made at the end of the letter sent a tingling feeling all over his body – glancing at the parchment, he was indeed a bit familiar with these words.

“Quickly go and bring Scroll over,” Roland instructed Nightingale.

Not much later, Scroll arrived at the castle after rushing over

from City Hall. After summoning her magic book, the Prince read it and couldn't help but frown.

When looking at the “Holy Book” Cara had brought back from the ruins in the eastern forest, and the documents found in ruins in the Fjord, he found out that the characters used were exactly the same! This way confirming Tilly's guess to the letter, these ancient ruins had been built by the hands of the very same group of people.

If it was the Church that built all these, why did they abandon them? Moreover, it wasn't only those magnificent buildings, even the records from four hundred and fifty years ago have been left behind but weren't erased. What was it they'd wanted to hide?

Even the burning hot sun of the final month of summer was powerful enough to let Roland feel even the smallest bit of warmth, but he now only felt an indistinct cold, both gloomy and chilly, come rising from the soles of the feet.

Is the stone tower discovered by Lighting in the Concealing Forest also related to those ruins? And the demonic beasts, the Devils, and the Holy City of Taqulia ... In the end, just what kind of accident happened four hundred and fifty years ago?

At the bottom of Roland's heart, an unease was welling up.

Chapter 258 - The Witches From Sleeping Island (Part 1)

The letter also mentioned that Tilly was trying to translate the words and would like to know whether the Witch Union could provide her with any clue.

Roland decided that he would include the news about the Devils and the Holy City of Taquila in his next reply to her. Furthermore, he also wanted to add Soraya's picture of the previous events. Maybe that information might somehow help her with her translation. This information wasn't suitable to be hidden away, as long as he could understand what kind of unforeseen event had happened more than four hundred years ago, it would help him prepare a response ahead of time. They might be even able to discover the weak point of the Church – if there hadn't been something they needed to worry over, then there was no reason to go so far to bury the past in the soil.

It was evident that there were some things that they wanted to keep from being discovered at any cost.

In addition, it would be beneficial for them to send someone to explore the stone tower in the Concealing Forest. The access to the ruins in the Eastern Regions Sea Wind Region was blocked by the Church, while the ruins in the Fjords had been buried beneath the ocean's surface for longer period of the year. And beside the pile of books in the secret chamber, almost nothing else was left there. But seeing men's footprints within the depths of the Concealing Forest were rare, even the Church was unable to reach it so easily. So it was perhaps the place where they could go in order to find

some useful clues.

But the report about the Devil that Lightning had encountered also caused fear to arise in Roland. Such an exploration couldn't be done without the witches, but if he was to dispatch the witches and they suffered some losses, he would be unable to bear the guilt. After considering it over and over, Roland ultimately decided to wait until the First Army had been completely equipped with the newest generation of firearms. He would then let them embark together with the witches into the forest and he was sure they could then deal with every possible Devil they might encounter.

Suppressing the seething unrest within his heart, Roland revealed a forced smile, "I understand what Tilly's is trying to do. So I will write a reply to her with a good descriptions of the situation, but nevertheless it is still better if we first proceed with your capability tests."

After all, developing one's strength as far as possible during peacetime was the right choice of action. That way, when war inevitably arrived, they would at least have the ability to keep on fighting.

A test site was selected that was once more outside of the city walls. In order to prevent any people from entering the testing ground, Roland had also mobilized to First Army to enclose the surroundings and also hinder anyone who tried to enter or leave.

The first one who went through the testing was Lotus.

Her age was similar to Nightingale's, she possessed short voluminous black hair, and facial features were the "pretty daughter coming from a humble family" type, her overall appearance was quite lovely. With a small size of around one meter fifty and a skinny body, when compared to the tall Nightingale, she looked like a little girl who has yet to completely grow up, giving off a sense of weakness. But if there was one thing that couldn't be called weak it would be her abilities. Within a five-meter area, she could easily change the topography of the land beneath her feet.

The description of the letter was far from the shock he felt when seeing it. During the test, Lotus let the earth beside her rise up vertically, like an "earth pillar" which was growing into the sky. It was only when the "earth pillar" reached a height of seven to eight meters that it finally collapsed because of the structural destabilization.

According to Lotus, the more loose the ground was, the less magic it took to transform, but at the same time, the quality would also become inferior. Houses and walls built this way would also be of lower standard. If the main component of the ground was gravel, it also became difficult to create something decent – apparently, she could only change the terrain, not modify the material of the earth itself. Of course, this problem could be solved by simply expanding the scope and thickness of the growth.

Roland let her demonstrate her power once more by asking her to build a house, but the soil of the Western Territory was clearly not as packed as the soil found on Sleeping Island. The earthen house which directly rose out of the ground pressed together several

times before it finally formed a building with spaces for a window and an archway, but to make this possible the final walls thickness needed to reach half a meter. After the completion of the house, it looked like a simple and crude cave and could only fulfill the most fundamental demands for a living place. Compared with the arrangement according to the compact architecture of a brick house, it fell short by a lot.

But then again, living in a house cave was much better than living in a wooden sheet with air leaking in all over the place. At least in winter, with a brazier and a kang, this house cave would become warm. So, in case he wasn't able to build enough brick houses before the arrival of the Months of Demons, he could still temporary use those cave houses.

The last part of the test was the summary of the examination – Lotus' ability belonged to the summoning type, she possessed no branching ability, and her ability to shape the terrain was effective within a five-meter range. During her casting, it was easily affected by the power of a God's Stone of Relation, but the moment the land had been transformed it wouldn't shrink back after.

“How is her magic level?” Roland asked.

“It looks like a brown cyclone, with a very dense center, compared to the other witches, her magic level is superb,” Nightingale said, “It is relatively close to Leaves’.”

“Consumption?”

“When raising the ground level it isn’t bad,” she said while looking towards the bulging stone wall at the foot of the North Slope Mountain. “However, when using her magic to transform the earth it rapidly declines, I’m afraid she will only be able to maintain it for one or two double hours.

Roland nodded. Leaves’ amount of magic power was the third most within the Witch Union, second only to Anna and Soraya. After all, having enough magical power was the premise to continually putting one’s ability to use – of course, there were also cases like Nightingale and Lightning, who had abilities with a low power consumption and thus even with a small magical source they could still activate their ability during the whole day without facing any difficulty.

After recording the information within a book, Roland began the test of the second witch.

“Who wants to be next?”

“I, I, I!” Honey raised her hand.

Seeing her enthusiasm, Roland smiled, “Alright, then let me see your ability first.”

The girl named Honey was of a similar size, even somewhat shorter than Lotus. She had passed her day of adulthood just in the previous winter and seemed to have a very lively temperament. She had a head full of short fluffy curling brown hair, which resembled some fried dough twists. Her skin was slightly darker,

and around her neck, wrists, and ankles she wore chains of animal teeth.

Her primary ability was called “beast tongue”, which allowed her to tame all animals inside her range. With it she could tame animals from all species that would carry out her orders afterwards. However, the extent of the command wasn’t allowed to go over the ability of the animal and after the task was fulfilled the taming effect would automatically be lifted, or it could be lifted beforehand out of her own initiative.

Furthermore, Honey also had a fascinating branch ability: “animal messenger”. With it she was able to pass the taming command from one animal to another until it reached the target animal – for example, if there was only a bird around her, she could let it seek for a more powerful animal to serve her. Perhaps a grown cat, maybe a ferocious eagle, this process couldn’t be controlled by her, making the final result somewhat uncertain.

However, no matter if it were her primary or her branching ability, both were directly influenced by the God’s Stone of Retaliation. Especially animal messengers, a God’s Stone of Retaliation would immediately erase the instruction so that the animal would be set free. And also, the bigger the animal she tried to tame was, the more magic she would have to spend. According to her own words could she control a dozen birds at the same time, while in the event that her target was a cow, she would only be able to manage two or three at a time.

The third witch to be tested was Evelyn, she was about twenty-five to twenty-six years old, with an accent that typical came from

the people of King's City, which gave her immediately a somewhat familiar feeling.

According to Tilly's list, Evelyn was able to change low-quality wine's flavor and style entirely according to her preferences, as long as she had tasted it previously before – from the beginning, the reason that Roland had chosen this witch was evident, that was to get pure alcohol. Since she can change diluted ale into a delicious wine or fruit wine, liquor shouldn't be a problem for her, right?

For this regards, Roland had carefully prepared a few bottles of good wine, with a concentration from 50% until 95%. Even though they were a bit spicy and burned, but as long as you only drank one or two mouthfuls of it, there shouldn't be a big issue. The crucial point was to let her agree that the transparent liquid that burned the throat was indeed a type of wine.

But here in the countryside and under the scorching sun wasn't really a good place to taste wine. They had no access to delicious side dishes not any ice nor any crystal-glass cups. Furthermore, if he was to directly take out the white spirit with its strong burning scent, it was possible that the other side would misunderstand and think it was poison, because of this he thought that it would be subtler to act during the dinner. So just after asking Evelyn a few simple questions, Roland immediately moved over to the next witch.

Chapter 259 - The Witches From Sleeping Island (Part 2)

The fourth to be tested was Sylvie.

Whenever he faced the witch, Roland always felt a bit uncomfortable. It really wasn't because Nightingale had told him she lied too much, in modern society, with the exception of speaking to relatives and good friends, not even a dozen people could speak bluntly. Since long ago, he was already accustomed to hearing all kinds of flattering and rumors.

He just felt that he had no possibility to hide anything from her. Even worse, he knew that it wasn't an illusion, but the other's ability. Being able to ignore all visual barriers, as long as she wanted, wearing clothes in front of her was completely useless. But within a dark corner of his mind, Roland lamented not having this kind of ability himself, while also involuntarily changing his sitting position by tilting his legs.

Speaking of appearances, she could be considered as the most unique of the five witches: with aquamarine hair that dropped straight to her shoulders, slender eyebrows, and the fringes of her hair seemed to have the appearance of someone that had just stepped out of a picture. Especially her amber colored pupils, which were so transparent that they had almost no depth, as if they were mirrors that reflected all incoming light. Looking at them for a while, Roland felt as if a red beam could come shooting out at any moment now.

Sylvie's ability was very easy to understand, using her inner

sight, she was able to see everything – even the area behind her back was not an exception. Furthermore, her vision could penetrate all barriers, the specific depths of the penetration depended on her own desire. She also possessed a similar branch ability as Nightingale did: She could see the gathering and dissipation of magic.

Which itself was somewhat surprisingly to Roland, for the branch abilities to be so similar, then what about the primary ability? When he asked Sylvie this question, the latter first hesitated, but then said that from the hundreds of witches on Sleeping Island, there were no witches who had the same ability. He then felt a soft pinch on his left side coming from Nightingale, he knew that this sentence was the truth.

The reason for this is probably because the sample is just too small, Roland thought.

The last witch to be tested was Candle.

She and Anna had both experienced their day of adulthood when this year's Months of Demons was happening. When she was still a minor, her ability could only be used for lighting candles, oil lamps, torches and the like. But after her day of adulthood when her magic had also become more stable, this effect had also been significantly enhanced. Furthermore, after that day, she had gained the ability to preserve an object's characteristics for a brief moment – for example, after casting her magic on an ice cube, it wouldn't melt even after placing it in the hot sun. Instead, it would still send out bursts of cold.

At first glance, this ability seemed to be simply incredible. With it, Roland would be able to do many things he couldn't achieve using conventional means. But after several rounds of testing, Roland had to acknowledge that in the end, her ability wasn't as perfect as he had imagined it to be. First, it belonged to the category of enchanting abilities, which meant that she needed to have direct contact with the target. This limitation made it difficult for Candle to preserve high-temperature objects.

Thereupon his attempt to obtain a liquid drop of steel which would forever keep its incandescence state in that way providing the blast furnace with an everlasting heat source broke apart. With the exception of Anna, no one else would ever dare touch something that was as hot as a thousand-degrees with their bare hands. And in case the metal was turned into a long and thin iron wire, allowing Candle to keep hold of one end while enchanting the other also led to another problem.

Which was that the more the object's state surpassed what was considered as its normal state, the greater the magical consumption would be, and the duration of the effect would also become shorter.

Roland used ice to verify this point – after solidification, he cut a block of ice into two equally large sizes. One he put onto the scolding hot ground while he threw the other into a basin filled with water. The former only persisted for an hour before it quickly began to melt, while for the other, besides cooling the water's temperature still maintained its original form.

This meant that when the effect was placed on red hot iron or

steel, it would only become more inefficient.

Finally, the volume of the object was also a factor which restricted Candle's ability. Like Hummingbird and Mystery Moon, the greater the size of the object was, the more magic Candle needed to spend. According to Nightingale's observation, Candle's amount of magic was placed within the lower to middle ranks. It looked like a golden mist, which had yet to form a dense cyclone.

But even with all these restriction, the somewhat introvert looking girl was still Roland's biggest harvest of this group of witches. In the field of industrial construction, being able to solidify an object's state could be considered as an utterly priceless treasure. The key lied in the word "normal state". The constant heating and cooling, friction, or any other kind of force which influenced the material would cause the metal to fatigue, which would lead to the deformation of the overall structure. But now he no longer had to worry about drills becoming too hot due to friction, and would no longer need to be concerned with a tools daily abrasion. If the key parts of the machines could be kept in a "normal" state all of the time, it would mean that the machines could always maintain their state of maximum efficiency and could work at the best possible accuracy.

In other words, Candle could effectively improve the mechanical strength of inferior materials.

Back to the castle's office, Roland took out the ability record and skimmed over them once again, and then started planning their future work.

“How were they?” Nightingale stuck her head out of the fog, “Are you fond of any of those five in particular?”

“They are all pretty good,” Roland casually agreed.

“What?! You like all of them?”

He threw her a glare, while the latter stuck out her tongue and then further nibbled at the fish in her mouth.

Obviously, at present, the ones that were the most useful to him were Lotus and Candle.

With her ability to transform the landscape, he could easily build a new earthen wall outside of the current city wall – instead of having to build another fieldstone cement wall, in this way conserving materials and accelerating the construction process. As for the location she would work in, he had selected the smallest sector between the foot of the North Slope Mountain and the Redwater River. It should be small enough that it could be completed before the arrival of the Months of Demons, while at the same time also limiting Border Town’s westwards expansion. In the wake of the unceasing increase of population, it was only a matter of time before those pieces of wilderness and the Concealing Forest would be developed.

The new earthen wall would be extended to the outer parts of the Concealing Forest, while it would already include some part of the forest. This expansion would double the current area of the town.

As for lengthening the defensive line, this problem could be resolved through the expansion of the troops and by leading the demonic beasts to attack predetermined areas. However, compared with the previous years wooden pikes and flintlocks, today's First Army's firepower and rate of attack had undergone earthshaking changes. Furthermore, building batteries, bastions or similar defense measures was still possible after completing the new city walls.

He also intended to let Lotus open up a path through the southern mountain, and in that way connect Border Town to the shoal. And as a result, the town could get its own natural harbor, which would also make trading with the Fjords much more convenient. Taking into account the huge amount of magical power she would have to spend to transform the rock, Roland estimated that this project could take up to several months' time.

As for Candle, Roland planned, that she would work together with Anna and Lucy to create a new generation of machine tools for the production of firearms and other mechanical equipment. Another good point coming from this would be that Anna could also be freed from the tedious production process.

Sylvie's task was very clear, her mission would be to explore the North Slope mine and the Concealing Forest. According to the stories from the miners, the North Slope Mine was a natural cave with a hundred or more channels, from which no one knew where they would end up. By now only twenty of them had been exploited and cleaned up, even though many kinds of ore had already been discovered. In the end, Roland still felt very curious about the credibility of the rumors that the mine was an ancient monster lair.

Now that he had gotten hold of a witch who had the ability to see through walls, he desired the completion of exploration of the North Slope Mine together with drawing a detailed map. As they explored, Lotus could also adjust the terrain and in doing so increase the mining's efficiency.

As for Honey, Roland didn't have a lot of ideas, except for maybe asking her to help him to strengthen his information transmitting system, in this era without any radios. For this, he needed a lot of well-trained birds which could serve as carrier pigeons. It wasn't necessary for them to be as smart as Maggie, it would already be good enough if they could forward the messages as quickly as possible.

Chapter 260 - Perfumed Soap And Wine

The sun slowly descended behind the western mountains, and the surging heatwave gradually began to vanish, even the chirping of the cicadas during the summer gradually subsided. However, compared to Sleeping Island which was enclosed by the ocean on all sides, the castle still seems a bit too hot.

Evelyn, covered with sweat, reached the second floor, and the moment she pushed open the door to her bedroom she was enveloped in a burst of coolness.

“Today’s test must have been hard on you,” a woman with black hair, a mature and capable appearance said while showing her a warm smile, “How was it, did it go smoothly?”

Her name was Scroll, not only was she the oldest witch of the Witch Union but she was also a very kind senior. Although they knew each other only for a day, Evelyn had already experienced the other’s care and concern.

“I... do not know,” Evelyn replied with some frustration. “The other people were all able to show off their own ability. However, when it came to my turn, His Highness only asked me a few questions before he let me off. Is it... because he thinks I’m useless?”

Coming over and offering her a cup of iced water Scroll answered, “There doesn’t exist an ability which completely lacks a function, it only means that the right way to use it hasn’t been

discovered yet. This is something His Highness has often told us, so you do not need to worry about that.”

“But...” she took the cup, started to speak but then stopped.

“Are you worried that he might decide that you are useless and because of this you’d be left out?” Scroll could not help but laugh, “If we were still the Witch Cooperation Association from before, that might be possible, but since we have arrived in Border Town, His Royal Highness has never shown any difference in how he treated us witches, that is something Hummingbird can attest to.”

The girl who was currently immersed in searching for clothes in the cabinet answered in agreement, “That’s right. For example: Me, Mystery Moon, Lily ~ah, and also Miss Nana recently had nothing suitable to do, so His Highness even encouraged us to play Gwent to relieve our boredom.”

“Relieve... boredom?” Evelyn’s eyes became wide.

“Yeah, it sounds incredible, right? When there is something to be done, you have to work hard, but if there is nothing to do, you can play freely, at least that’s what he said to me,” Hummingbird paused, “It’s only that I feel that His Highness is a little bit biased, he and Anna are clearly very close friends.”

“Of course, she is the first witch he ever got acquainted with, so their feelings to each other are much deeper,” Scroll interrupted and knocked against her head, “Quickly go and get your clean clothes, if not, there won’t be much running water left tonight.”

She then looked at Evelyn and said, “You should also come with us.”

“Where are we going?” Evelyn asked in confusion.

“To take a shower,” Scroll answered with a smile, “During the summer, there is nothing more pleasantly than standing in the shower to wash yourself.”

When Evelyn followed the two into the bathroom, she couldn’t keep herself from shouting out in surprise. It seemed she had stepped into an extensive grassland, a sea of clouds and mountains in front of her, and the setting sun falling through a window was reflected by the walls and dyed the clouds in a touch of gold.

“This is–”

“Soraya’s masterpiece,” Scroll laughed, “This is not a traditional decorative painting, you will understand it when you take off your shoes.”

Following her words, Evelyn took off her wooden sandals and put them onto a shoe cupboard beside the door. She then stepped barefoot on the “grassland”, and immediately understood the meaning of Scroll’s words. The tactile sensation she felt coming from the soles of her feet was similar to that of walking over dense grassland. Moreover, it felt as if the lawn was sprinkled with water droplets, a reminiscent of the feeling after a heavy rainfall.

In the meantime, Scroll was already taking off her clothes, loosened the braids to free her tails, and let her long black hairs fall down. Evelyn then saw her go toward the wall, screw a wrench, and several water threads suddenly spray out from the pole extending overhead, covering her completely.

“How about it, don’t you think it’s convenient?”

Hummingbird came over and placed something round into her hand, “This is a bath article developed by His Highness himself, when used during a shower the feeling cannot be more wonderful. Come on, I’ll show you how to use it.”

When Evelyn returned to the bedroom, she felt as if her whole body had become lighter.

Evelyn had never experienced such a comfortable bath. Using the scented soap covered her entire body in bubbles, and after she washed them away with water, the sticky feeling she had felt from head to toe was immediately swept away, replaced by a fresh and smooth feeling. After putting on the clean clothes, the hot air seemed to have become cool, and when lifting her arm, she could smell the fragrance of roses left behind on her skin.

Is this the daily life of the witches of the Witch Union?

Evelyn was still somewhat struck in disbelief, she was born in the outer city of King’s City, to a family who ran a pub. Even though

most of their customers had been farmers and peasants, yet one of their always recurring topics of conversation had always been about the nobles' lives in the inner city, so while serving the wine, she had heard many stories. About things such as gilded bathtubs filled with wine, as well as milk filled bathtubs sprinkles with rose petals... but even the most unbelievable rumor, could never match her experience today – at least Evelyn thought that a bath in milk or wine could never feel as comfortable as this did.

Remembering that the owner of this castle was a real prince, it was only normal for him to pay extra attention to his comfort and enjoyment. But that the witches could actually enjoy the same lifestyle as the royal family was naturally hard for her to imagine. Before leaving for Sleeping Island, she had already experienced that even being able to maintain an ordinary life was already considered an extravagant hope.

“Hungry?” Scroll wiped her hair dry and retied her braids, “It will soon be time for dinner, so we should go to the hall now.”

The living room was located on the first floor, the long wooden eating table was filled with all kinds of dishes. Roughly counting, Evelyn saw six pots of meat, as well as egg soup, vegetable soup and roasted mushrooms, which was not much worse than yesterday's welcome feast.

Waiting until all the other witches had taken their place, they all started together. She soon noticed that apart from the knife and fork some people were also using a pair of wooden sticks to eat their food. The same was also true for His Royal Highness, the times he picked up the knife and fork was even less than the

others, and the way in which he moved his hand while using the wooden stick looked very flexible. The food served at the table also had no big steaks, whole chicken or ducks – different from the commonly seen food in the taverns, the stake was already cut into many small pieces, while the wild boar legs had already been freed from the bones, allowing it to be eaten by simply picking it up.

When the dinner came to its conclusion, the Prince suddenly clapped his hands and announced, “I recently developed two new things and I plan to spread them around as merchandise, but I’m still not sure about its result. So I want you to try it in advance and afterward give me your opinion.”

“What is it, something to eat?”

“Alright, I’ll try it!”

“Me too, goo!”

The witches of the Witch Union immediately cried out in approval. Seeing their reaction, Evelyn turned with a shocked look on her face to Scroll, only to see the latter smile and then explain, “His Highness creates some novel things, such as the perfumed soap you previous used, or perfume, chopsticks, Ice Cream... Before he puts them into production, he will always let us test them first.”

“Cough, cough,” the Prince cleared his throat, “The first thing is a wine, which compared with the typical ale and wine’s taste is much more mellow and rich, but also more intoxicating.

Therefore, the minor witches aren't allowed to participate."

"Your Highness, this is prejudice!" Lightning shouted, "I can drink a lot more than the adult sailors!"

"Even though it is still out of the question."

"Oh..." The little girl pursed her lips, but Roland was still unmoved and instead told the attendants to serve the good liquor to the adult witches.

In front of Evelyn were placed three cups – looking at the sparkling crystal glass cups she saw that they had all been filled with different drinks. One cup was filled with a colorless liquid, which looked similar to water, one cup was milky white, while the last cup was a shiny orange. Within the vibrant candle light, she could see some small objects floating in the last cup, which conversely seemed to be an unfiltered fruit wine.

"They are white wine mixed with apple juice, white wine mixed with milk, and finally, pure white wine," Roland introduced, "Ice can be added according to your tastes, but the more you put in, the more the wine's flavor will be diluted."

He then smiled to Evelyn, "You have been staying in the capital's pub for a long time, and you also have the ability to make different kinds of drinks, I hope to hear your evaluation of this new type of wine."

Evelyn could not stop her heart from dancing for a little while, she picked up the cup with the orange drink, pursed her lips and swallowed a mouthful. And sure enough, just as His Royal Highness had said, the flavor of the white wine was far more intense than that of ale. It even burned her throat somewhat. It tasted bitter at the tip of her tongue, but the apple's taste also diluted its impact. Lastly, there was the wine's own rich and mellow aroma – the succession of several flavors resonated inside her mouth, forming an excellent wine like she had never tasted before.

The white wine mixed with cow milk was a little milder, almost completely covering over the bitterness. Besides the cow milk she could also taste something which must have been honey or perhaps sugar. This sweetness formed an entirely new flavor together with the aromatic wine.

Turning to the last cup, Evelyn heart was already filled with expectation she readily took a small sip, then a burning hot sensation immediately rolled all over her tongue and down her throat – just like she had already anticipated it, it had no other flavor, only the pure flavor of wine. First burning hot and then followed by a bitter sweetness.

“All the tastes of these glasses of wine are... unforgettable,” she put down the cup and took a deep breath, “Your Royal Highness, some people may be unable to accept its strong and irritating flavor. But I think that people who truly love to drink wine, will be unable to resist possessing wine with such a mellow and rich flavor.”

“Is that so?” Roland laughed, “That’s good to hear, but it wasn’t the case that the cup contained the strongest of white wine. I’m sure that I can improve its rich and mellow flavor even further, so when that times comes I want you to sample it for me again.”

Uh, did he pick me to test the new wine for him? Although Evelyn was somewhat confused, she still opened her mouth to reply, “Yes, Your Highness.”

When the cups and plates were removed, the Prince ordered his attendants to bring over a pile of boxes and place them on the long table.

“These are my second creations, and also a little present I’m going to give you,” he paused, “it is a piece of special piece of clothing.”

Chapter 261 - Gifts

After dinner, Nightingale returned to the bedroom while holding the unopened box in her hands. She was followed by Lightning, Maggy, Lily, and Mystery Moon, who also entered after her, keeping their attention focused on the box the entire time.

“How is it?” Wendy couldn’t stop herself from teasing them, “Would you like to take a look at what’s inside?”

Except for Lily, the three others nodded again and again.

“His Highness is totally biased!” Lightning muttered, “First he doesn’t let us taste the wine, and now we don’t even get a gift!”

“He said that it was only for the adult witches, ah,” Lily sighed, “Just wait until you are old enough, if you asked him then, you would also get one. Furthermore, I’m not interested at all about what kind of cloth is inside, so why did you drag me over here?”

“Hey,” Mystery Moon looked amazed, “I merely called you, no one pulled you along, ah.”

“I–“

“Stop, that isn’t the important point!” Lightning shouted, “Mystery Moon is already of age, and Maggie is also an adult, but they both didn’t get it!”

“That’s right, goo!” Maggie pushed the white hair which covered her face to the back and raised her chin in protest, “I also didn’t get it, goo!”

“This... His Royal Highness surely has his own reasons for doing that.” Nightingale also felt that it was a bit strange, previously Roland had never treated anyone differently, so why did he do so this time? “For now, let us just look at what is inside.”

When she opened the box, all she saw was a strange piece of “clothing” – it looked like something made out of a few bands and two pockets. When she touched it, it felt very soft and had evidently been made out of the highest quality silk fabric, but no matter how she looked at it, she couldn’t understand what kind of cloth this should be, it was simply too small.”

“There is a piece of paper under it,” Lightning suddenly shouted.

After spreading out the sheet of paper, Nightingale discovered that it not only contained a description and usage for the gift, but also a diagram describing how it should be used.

“Uh...” Wendy who had opened her own box asked in confusion, “This thing is called a bra?”

“... it can bring relief to the chest area by reducing its weight, it promotes blood circulation, stabilized the posture while simultaneously lessening the discomfort caused by friction to the skin.” Reading the letter Nightingale’s voice became smaller and smaller, while her cheeks suddenly became hot and red. This thing

is actually used to hold the chest? She couldn't stop her eyes from wandering over to Wendy, only to discover that the other witches' vision had simultaneously moved over to her. They all suddenly showed an understanding expression.

“Pfft,” Lily couldn't suppress her laugh any longer, “Now you finally understand why you didn't receive a present, right? Tsk, now I have to correct my words from before, even if Lightning was fully grown up, it might be possible that she still won't receive a gift.”

“The same seems to be true for you,” Mystery Moon said while she goggled at her.

“I don't want it anyway,” the latter turned away and showed a supercilious expression.

“This should be similar to a skintight corset, right?” Only Lightning seemed to be completely unmoved. Rather, she was looking at it with eyes full of curiosity and envy, “Can you wear it so that I can take a look?”

“Of course not!” Wendy suddenly exposed a rarely seen embarrassed appearance then started driving the four of them out, only then was she able to feel relief, “How can it be that His Highness suddenly... present us with this?”

Thinking about it Nightingale also felt a bit embarrassed. If he had given simple personal clothes it would have still been proper. After all, we usually fetched ours from the castle anyway, so no one

would feel too embarrassed about it. But these clothes are made with different sizes, which means, that before Roland gave us our gift, he had carefully observed each person's size? The idea of this caused her to blush, and she couldn't help but want to hide in her fog to escape.

By the way, what would Anna do?

"I'm leaving, but I will return quickly," Nightingale said then stepped into the fog, passed through the walls. Hesitating for only a moment when she came over to Anna's bedroom, but she still decided to knock on the door.

Soon the door opened, showing Anna, dressed in a nightgown, looking the same as usual. "Is there anything?"

"Uh, I want to ask..." Nightingale stepped into the room and closed the door, "His Royal Highness also sent a gift to you right... what do you think about it?"

"I'm already wearing mine, it's very convenient."

The other side's answer caught her somewhat off guard, "You already put it on?"

"Um," Anna nodded, "Do you want to see?"

"No, no, that's not necessary," she hurriedly waved her hand to stop Anna, "I just want to ask, do you not think it's strange?"

“Why,” Anna became clearly puzzled. “His Royal Highness already said that he wanted to promote it and sell it as a commodity to even more people. So we need to help him by wearing them in advance. And also, they are pretty good,” she patted her chest, “It’s both, soft and flexible. Also, with the hook at the back, it isn’t so easy for others to take it off, so it’s much better than wearing many layers of undergarments.”

So, that’s how it is... Nightingale couldn’t refrain from sighing in sorrow, she doesn’t care about these minutiae things. Instead, she only focuses on achieving His Highness goal. Perhaps this is what makes her so unique, she was pure and straightforward. Since it was a gift from Roland, Nightingale knew that she would try it in the end, so what reason was there to be so self-conscious about? Previously it has also been the same thing, it was completely unnecessary to wish that he didn’t see me. Instead, I should have confidently told him my thoughts right away – if it had been Anna that’s definitely what she would have done, right?”

Thinking of this, Nightingale returned to her room, picked up the bra and studied it for a while, then hid in the fog as she put it on, before covering herself with her usual outer clothing, and finally reappearing before Wendy afterward.

“It’s a little too big,” she tried jumping, “But it is indeed very comfortable to wear. At least it isn’t as rough as those boring old clothes, they would always painfully rub my chest. Moreover, they do not affect one’s movement, which makes it unnecessary to bind a cloth band around your chest, which is quite convenient... You should also to try it.”

“No, I still do not need...” Wendy shook her head.

“How can that be,” Nightingale chuckled while pulling the other into the fog. “I always feel it was because of you, that His Highness designed this.”

Sylvie felt that today she had seen more marvelous things than in the past few years put together.

The pipe which released water at the mere pull of a lever. The soap which cleared away dirt and left behind a fragrant odor. And the drink which set the throat aflame – but could it be, that Evelyn had already finished her task by accompanying His Highness to drink the three cups of wine?

Naturally, the most incredible part was the gifts which had been given out after dinner... She knew that the nobility had the practice of sending over corsets when they approached someone, however, others would usually pair it with a cinched waist dress. Who would just gift this outright by itself? And even if they send it as a gift, it would only be sent to people they are very close to... for example, lovers.

But listening to His Highness explanation, he didn't plan on only giving this close-fitting garment to just the witches, but to also spread it even further.

Does he want to spread it through the whole Western Territory? Sylvie could feel goosebumps all over her body, what kind of noble would choose to do this business, or could it be... does he have some kind of unusual interest in the chest and buttocks?

After Nightingale pulled Wendy into the fog, she could only vaguely see two blurs of light and shadow floating near the bedside – since they didn't come out after a long time, it was obviously that under the former's coaxing Wendy had finally decided on accepting the gift. Then, what about the other witches? Do none of them understand the meaning of sending over personal clothes?

Recalling Ashes' warning, Sylvie couldn't help but swallow.

She was right – His Highness is indeed a dangerous person. If I can, it's better to stay even further away from him.

Chapter 262 - The Bridge Across The Redwater River

A week later, Roland officially started the great steel-bridge construction project.

“You mean, I should raise two lands in the middle of the river, which will act as the foothold of the bridge pier?” Lotus looked at the surging river and asked in amazement, “Don’t tell me you plan to construct an actual bridge, rather than a pontoon bridge to connect both sides of the river?”

“Yes,” Roland spread out the scroll he held in his hand, “Taking into account the impact of the river current, it is necessary for the two pieces of land to have a certain volume. They also need to be constructed in this way to reduce the force of the impact.”

“This... looks like a ship,” Lotus let her view wander across the blueprint.

“That’s right, speaking accurately it’s called the spindle type,” he nodded, “As long as they are built parallel to the direction of the flow, the impact it receives from the front will be reduced to the smallest amount possible. The problem is that the Redwater River is nearly ten meters deep, will you still be able to make the earth rise?”

“This shouldn’t be hard to do, Your Highness,” Lotus simply replied, “Just give it to me.”

To be safe, the ship responsible for carrying the witch was Little Town, standing on the massive hull of the cement ship floating in the river was like standing on land. It was still Lightning who took over the position of the helmsman, while Wendy was again responsible for providing the wind.

But during the last week, it seemed that the latter had avoided the Prince's line of sight, seemingly feeling a bit uncomfortable. Until this day when Roland saw her walking around with her head held up, looking as if she was back to her usual self again. And finally, when she went past him to board the ship, he even heard her whispering a soft "thank you".

"This is something you can come thank me for," Nightingale whispered into his ear from within her fog.

The Little Town soon left the pier, driving to the center of the wide river. Carter had already pulled a hemp rope across the river, there were two red cloth belts tied to it which marked the location for the piers. After the cement boat arrived at the site of the first pier, Lotus went to the ship's railing and began to put her ability to use.

Looking at the river, its surface suddenly resembled boiling water, sending up one bubble after the other, while slowly forming a "hill". Not long after, gravel together with algae and silt began to rise from within the surging river water, gradually turning all of the water muddy.

So, that's how it works, Roland thought. Her ability could not only transform a solid surface, but also water. Furthermore, it was even easier to lift than loose gravel was. Even though the surging river was immediately washing it away, but by now the river bed had already been lifted up a little.

Not long after, a gray mass of mud appeared on the water surface. It seemed to be very soft, but it also gave off a very unpleasant odor, making it impossible for all those present to not cover their noses.

However, in Roland's eyes, this gray mass was the best kind of fertilizer. The soil contained hundreds of years of fish and other aquatic bones, aquatic plants, as well as the inhabitants of the depths' excrement. If the transport wasn't too inconvenient, Roland would like to gather all of this soil and use it as fertilizer. Unfortunately, at present, it could only be collected by hand through directly entering the river water.

So, after clearing up the fertilizer layers and improving the section, he finally saw the yellow-brown solid earth he had waiting for. The following steps were to repeat the process again and again until the two pieces of land had been fully formed.

Roland expected that this course of event would at least continue for around one week, but even after the soil was lifted up and broke through the water surface, it didn't mean that the land could be used. The flow of the river would unceasingly carry away the silt, and without further protection, even if the piers were formed according to the spindle design, they wouldn't be able to persevere for longer than ten years.

Trying to come to a conclusion, Roland called Karl van Bate to his side, took out a piece of charcoal, and began to paint the steps needed to solidify the ground.

“Is your idea to dig holes into the soil and fill them up with cement?” This newly promoted Minister of Construction asked after analyzing the drawing.

He once more proved why he had once been one of the most exceptional members of King’s City’s Stonemason Guild, Roland thought in satisfaction. With only a few words of what I was able to remember, and he immediately managed to understand my intentions.

“That’s right, but every segment mustn’t exceed five meters in length, while it should be around one meter in depth. When you’re filling it up with cement, call for Lotus to let her bury it one meter into the earth. By repeating this we will be able to form a cement wall which goes straight from the surface of the river and into the river bed.” Roland had come up with this plan after seeing Lotus’ ability in action. Since she could control the surface and make it drop, she could presumably also bury a structure that was above the earth into the ground.

“Your idea is indeed extremely ingenious,” Carl said with sparkling eyes. “This way, even if the river washed away the outer soil, there will still be the cement wall left to block the water.”

Roland nodded, “The crucial point is to control the overall height

of the cement blocks. If it is too small, it will lead to the problem where the bottom part will become unstable, while if it's more than needed, besides the waste of cement it will also delay the construction. So, I am laying responsibility for this take on your shoulders."

"Yes, Your Royal Highness," Karl agreed, "Looking at the silt and soft soil coming up, I am guessing that the final height of the cement wall should be around twelve meters."

"Also, after you surround all sides with the cement wall, don't cover the land in the middle with cement, I want to grow several kinds of flowers and grass on top of it afterwards," the Prince warned repeatedly.

"Several kind of... flowers?" Karl looked confused.

After all, these walls were unable to be made watertight, and when the segments had to be repaired, there would always be gaps left behind. If you wished to consolidate the soil, the simplest method was to plant different kinds of grass and flowers – the vegetation would reduce the water within the ground, while also reducing the soil erosion. That would be especially true after Leaves came and used her magic to lengthen the weeds' root system, in that way ensuring that the earth would be firmly knit together.

After a simple explanation on how plants could strengthen the soil, Roland turned to look at the workers who were busy on the river banks, "What is the current state of the bridge's approach construction?"

“We are right in the middle of laying the cement gravel for the road’s surface,” Karl reported without thinking, “They should be completed by this week.”

According to the plan, the approaches on either side of the river would be made by piled up fieldstone and cement, just like they had done with the city walls. As long as the positioning and measurement was correct, the construction itself wouldn’t be that complicated. The highest point of the ramp was seven meters above ground, and it connected with the city streets through a long gentle and curving slope. There was also some further height difference between the river’s dike compared to the water surface. After finishing the construction of the bridge, the difference between the water surface and the bridge should be around twelve meters. Which ought to be high enough for sailing ships to pass through.

So far only the first step of the bridge itself was completed, and it was currently undergoing a strength test on the shore – due to its small span, the load placed on it would be very small. This way the bridge would still be reliable even though Roland was ignorant about bridge engineering. In the absence of the eight wheel trucks from appearing in later centuries, a thirty-centimeter strong I-beam should guarantee the bridge’s stability. Even if the bridge was completely filled with people, it would still be impossible to break the steel beam. Even more so since the process of its construction, from assembling to welding it, had been completely taken care of by Anna, so the probability of a jerry-built construction project was extremely low.

Equally, the installation of the bridge would also be very simple.

When the three-span bridge was completed, Hummingbird would use her ability to reduce its weight and would then give it to Lightning so that she could take it to its intended location.

From that point on two wagons in parallel could use the steel bridge to cross the Redwater River at the same, something which truly connected the northern and southern side.

“Even if they were the greatest of mason, it would still be hard for them to imagine such a magnificent bridge,” Karl lamented as he looked at the wide river’s sparkling surface, “Your Royal Highness, does this steel bridge have a name?”

After thinking about it, Roland announced, “I presume it should be called ‘Redwater Bridge’.”

Chapter 263 - “[Ripened Wheat](#)”

Under the hot scorching sun, Sirius Daly, wearing a straw hat, was walking along the river's shore, examining the growth of the wheat.

Now four months after the planting, this day was the day in which the wheat had finally ripened.

As far as the eye could see, there was an unending wheat field surrounding him like a golden ocean. The wheat's ears were thick and full, the amount of fruit had more than doubled, and was even bigger than that of any spring wheat he had seen before. There was no need to wait until the weighing of the harvest, Sirius already knew that this year was bound to be a bumper harvest.

Without a doubt, this was surely because of the witches' contribution.

He had accompanied his father in planting for ten years now, so he naturally knew what common wheat looked like. One wheat plant would have between one to three ears, and each ear could produce twenty to thirty fruits. That the fertility of the soil could actually influence the wheat grain's size was still believable, but could it so straightforwardly double the size of the caryopsis? Besides it being the work of a witch, he could think of no other explanation for this.

It seems that there had been many changes like this one, for instances, the new water towers looming over Border Town – he

had once observed those huge monstrosities from close up, and come to the conclusion that it would be impossible to install those steel tubes that were even larger than a residential building by depending on human strength alone; yet they had been built almost overnight. Nowadays, the people living in the new district only seldom needed to carry a bucket and go draw water. As long as they unscrewed the faucet, cool well water would come flowing out from the pipe.

The same was true for the “islands” at the center of the Redwater River, since His Highness had held the Honor and Reward Ceremony, and Miss Nana had been put on the stage, the usage of the witches became more and more known. Raising those islands in the middle of the river, was obviously something that only witches could do.

He had already asked City Hall’s Premier Minister Barov about this matter, but the answer he got in return was that he didn’t need to understand it, His Highness Roland naturally had his way.

I presume it should be okay... After all, the royal family always loved to meet head-on with the Church, even if the latter sends troops to suppress His Highness, they would have first to beat the First Army, only then would they be qualified to speak. Otherwise, the Western Territory can only ever belong to Roland Wimbledon.

Duke Ryan is only the latest example.

“Sir, you have come,” two serfs in the field who noted Sirius Daly, immediately came forward and greeted him, “You see, this piece of wheat field can be harvest now, the-therefore, may I ask

you...”

“We wish to ask Sir, if the Lord’s previous statements are still valid?”

“That’s right, that’s right,” the other serf agreed while at the same time nervously rubbing his hands, “Can we really be promoted to free people?”

As the head of the Ministry of Agriculture, besides recording the best way to plant and creating a statistic about the harvest, Sirius also had another important responsibility: That was to communicate with the serfs so that they would listen to His Highness as well as the City Hall’s policy. Although he didn’t like coming in contact with these country bumpkins who all day long spent their life in mud, but his knight’s self-discipline still let him fulfill his task.

“Do you see those slogans?” Sirius reached out with his hand and pointed towards the banner at the side of the farmland.

“Sir, I... cannot read...” the serf confessed with an embarrassed smile.

“Labor creates wealth, and work changes destiny,” he stated. “In other words, as long as you try to cultivate, you will have the opportunity to be promoted to become a free person. This is His Highness’ promise, and it will come true.”

“Is, is that so? That’s great!”

“After becoming a free man, you can live in the town center area, get your own brick house, as well as the right to a primary education. After that, you will no longer need to ask me for the meaning of that slogan.” Sirius once more repeated the corresponding propaganda.

“Yes, Sir,” The serf nodded excitedly. “The weather is so hot, do you want to go to my shed and have a cup of cold water?”

“I couldn’t, right now you must be very busy.” He said and waved in the direction of the fields. Understanding his meaning, the two quickly said their thanks and bowed for a long time before finally returning to their areas and busying themselves with their work. This was the most frequently asked question he’d heard in the last month. No matter how often he preached so, they would always take the trouble of coming to ask him again, fearing that His Highness would decide to cancel this policy in the blink of an eye.

Not much further down the road, he was once again encircled by a group of people, “Hello, Sir Sirius, after drying the wheat harvest, do we really only have to pay seven-tenths?”

Hearing the question, Sirius cried within his heart. This question’s frequency was second only to that of the “the free person promotion”.

“During the first year, this is indeed the case, and from then on it will only become less and less. If you’re promoted to become a

freed person you will only have to turn over two-tenths, we have already repeatedly stressed this point.”

“As if I will ever be promoted,” a tall man said while touching the back of his head, “That remaining three-tenths of wheat, can we —”

“—Can only be sold to His Highness, or used for your food, or be kept as seeds.” Sirius clapped his hands, bluntly calling all the surrounding serfs to come over, “Everyone listen well, Border Town prohibit anyone from privately selling food. It doesn’t matter whether it is sold to local townspeople, or to foreign businessmen, it is a violation of Border Town’s law. If you do it, not only will your income be confiscated, you can also be imprisoned.

“What should we do if the Lord only offers a very low price?” The tall man muttered.

“It’s only natural that there will be that kind of circumstance. The acquisition of food by His Highness is to stabilize the market price, so no matter if you have a poor harvest or a bumper harvest, it is unlikely to cause a substantial change in the price. Therefore, you don’t have to hold wheat back in fear that you don’t have enough to eat after selling it. You also don’t have to worry about harvesting too much and being unable to sell, or of only being able to sell at a low price.” Sirius emphasized again, “There is only one place in the whole Border Town where you can sell food, that is the convenience market, and that market falls under the management of our City Hall.”

“In the end, the price will be...?”

“Rest assured, His Royal Highness himself will announce it before he starts the acquisition.”

Looking at the serfs dispersing in groups of twos and threes Sirius licked his dry lips and continued to check on the crops. He did not know how many of them would keep his words in mind, but Sir Barov had made it clear that His Highness would drive a hard-line in case he discovered any people smuggling food, punishing them severely.

At that time, a young serf broke away from the crowd and turned back, “Sir,” he gasped, “I would like to ask you a question.”

“Yes?”

“Do you know where Miss May and Miss Irene have gone?” He hesitated. “Recently there haven’t been any plays performed in the central square, so I wanted... to ask you about their situation, whether or not they fell ill.”

This was a new and exciting question, Sirius couldn’t refrain himself from raising the corner of his mouth. If he hadn’t seen them in the City Hall going through the formalities, he would have been unable to answer it, “They went to Longsong Stronghold.”

“Ah,” the other side showed a disappointed expression, “Don’t tell me that they no longer intend to stay in Border Town?”

“They merely went to the stronghold theater to perform,” he shrugged, “Furthermore, the weather is so hot nowadays, no one would have the heart to see them standing under the sun and drenched in sweat, right? Wait until fall, they will come back and perform a new show in the square.”

“It... It is actually like this... thank you Sir!”

Looking at the back of the perfectly contented young man who was leaving, Sirius couldn't help but think of himself – from a knight to a captive, then from being a prisoner to a City Hall officer, the experience of the past few months could be described as a series of ups and downs. He no longer wanted to return to his home in the Wolf territory, there he had nothing besides his shabby house and a flaky piece of wheat field. The reason why he had become a Knight was to break away from his father's lifestyle as a farmer.

Not every Knight was as well regarded as Morning Light, who as the Duke's personal knight had the best territory and also his own entourage. His yearly salary now was more than he had ever gotten while being a knight, and there was still vast room left for growth. Perhaps it was finally time to bring his parents to Border Town, then marry a girl and start enjoying life.

Chapter 264 - Bumper Harvest

Border Town's finally welcomed its first day of harvest.

Braving the hot sun, the serfs cut the straw stalks with their sickles and tied the batches of wheat into bundles so that they could move them to the other side of the river at a later time.

Roland knew that freeing the wheat grain from the wheat kernel was a very cumbersome process, and the mechanical farm tools and harvesters also aren't invented yet, so for now they will still have to use their hands to separate, clean, dry, and screen the wheat.

After the stalks of grain had been moved back to the camp, the serfs spread them out on the ground to dry in the sun and gathered several kinds of tools – which more exactly was anything that they could lay their hands on: wooden sticks, stones, or rakes. They used these tools to repeatedly strike the wheat stalks and ears, trying to free the caryopsis from their hull, a process which often lasted for three to four days.

In Roland's memory, the rural areas would often use cows and donkeys to pull a stone roller which pressed the grains out of their shell. Not only did it save a lot of labor, but it also removed the husks more evenly than when striking it.

Roland had no other choice but to accept Border Town's backward standard of agriculture.

After the striking, the serfs again used anything they could to turn over the wheat, even using wooden sticks if they didn't have any forks. Those who had nothing else even used their hands to directly grab the wheat stalks and throw them into the sky, the same as when turning stir-fry over in a pot. After going through the first striking, most of the outer shells of the grains should already be broken, this process should allow the fruits to separate from the ear of wheat.

In fact, after threshing the remaining wheat straw still had plenty of uses. After being crushed, it could be returned to the fields or could be used as bedding for livestock, it could also be made into fodder or used for papermaking. However, Roland didn't have enough time to promote a green industry at the moment. All he could do was look on as the serfs brought those wheat straws to the river-side and burned them. In the days that followed, Border Town's sky was covered with a dusky smoke which was comparable to the time of the former cement powder pollution.

During this time, Redwater Bridge's two spindly type islands had also been finished, with the construction of the concrete walls having also gone according to plan. For the base of the bridge pier they had used the same prefabricated method as for the main bridge – first placing the steel and concrete into trenches to form the columns of reinforced steel, then reduce the weight and lift the walls in place. Finally it was Lotus' turn, she was in charge of sinking the walls into the earth until only a section of the steel plate was still exposed, to which they would later connect the bridge to.

While handling these two projects, Roland spent this whole week

traveling between the Redwater Bridge and the fields; which ended up giving him quite the tan.

By the time the straw was cleared away with forks, only layers of grain and their husk was still left in the grain-yard.

The serfs then swept it all together, and piled it into small hills. They then stepped on top of those hills, and used their shovels to throw the grains and husks into the air. Because the husks were so much lighter than the fruit, they were blown away further by the wind. As a result, the grain was still left at the foot of the hills, while the empty shells and debris laid at a distant location – by using this kind of method the serfs were slowly able to gather all of the grains.

Of course, wanting to completely clean up the husks was impossible. Furthermore, this process mixed the grain with the mud and gravel. Thus Roland decided that by next year's harvest, he would need to have prepared a sufficient batch of farm tools in advance – inventing a harvester wouldn't be possible, but the sheller machine should still be easily to realize. He merely had to exchange the stone roller with a millstone, furthermore he could also install a sieve beneath it and use an air blower to separate the grain from the chaff.

When the plump wheat grains were evenly spread over the whole valley, it looked like as if the entire northern shore of the Redwater River was covered by a golden layer. Looking at these golden fruits, Roland's heart was filled with a sense of accomplishment. No matter whether the harvest would be enough to fill the bellies of ten thousand people, at least for Border Town, this counted as a

memorable day.

From today on, Border Town's food supply would gradually change from being totally dependent on imports to achieving self-sufficiency.

After drying for three days, the wheat was all stuffed into bags and weighted.

"Your Highness, this was a great harvest!" In the afternoon, Barov excitedly rushed into the office, "According to the preliminary statistics from City Hall, each field's allocated output was at least fourfold more than normal, the highest output even reached six times as much. So this year's harvest will be enough to fill all your subject's belly."

"Is that so?" Roland couldn't help but laugh, "It seems that the new barn in the castle district will no longer be so empty."

"Do you know what this means?" The expression on the City Hall's Premier Minister seemed to be even more excited than Roland's, "Border Town only needs to increase their numbers of farmers by 2000, and we will be able to satisfy the food consumption of 50'000 to 60'000 people! This is simply inconceivable, Border Town can definitely expand to become Graycastle's largest city, no..." He paused, "The most magnificent city in the whole mainland!"

The main reason why the city's population of this era didn't increase was because that the food production capability was just

too small. For example, big cities like King's City that had more than 20'000 people needed more than a dozen surrounding villages to provided them with enough food. Each village would once more needed almost one thousand or two thousand people, if even just half of them were engaged in farming, it could be estimated that nearly twenty thousand people were needed to support another twenty thousand. In other words, a farmer's food production, in addition to feeding their family and themselves was up to one other city resident's.

This was the so-called invisible restriction of production capability. Roland feared it would be difficult for Barov to imagine, that after the mechanization of farming, just one person's output was enough to support tens of thousands of people. And that Border Town, in the absence of developing and spreading of agricultural technology, was still able to acquire this kind of bumper harvest, was mainly accredit to Leaves' magically transformed "Golden Ones".

To employ as few farmers as possible for feeding as many people as possible. Liberating the human resources from simply cultivating land to move onto the industrial production was the strategy that Roland had decided on from the beginning. Now after the Ministry of Agriculture had obtained the best planting process, coupled with the iron farming tools and machines to help with the farming coming next year, the per capita production was bound to become higher and higher.

In the evening, Roland once again held a bonfire speech at the shore of the Redwater River – it seems to be a return to the time

from four months ago, it was evening, there was a roaring fire in the background, the crowd formed a dense mass, and the last rays of twilight fell over everyone's face. The only difference to that day was the expression on each person's face, compared to the beginning of when they had arrived and were feeling both terrified and uneasy, their faces on this day were all brimming with joy at the bumper harvest and couldn't conceal the expectation in their eyes.

Roland stretched out his hand and moved it downwards, the scene around him quieting down immediately. Everyone was holding his breath, waiting for the Prince to fulfill his promise.

"I know what you want to hear," he did not follow his usual practice of first announcing his name, and instead came straight to the matter, "– I can tell you without a doubt, that the previously announced rules of promotion are still valid and will hold!"

Just this sentence was enough to detonate the atmosphere of the scene, not one person there could restrain themselves from shouting out loud, many people fell on their knees and praised the Prince's kindness. "Long live the Lord!" "Long live His Royal Highness!"

"After the end of the grain weighing, the promotion list will be announced," the moment the shouts had subsided a little, Roland continued, "The City Hall will be responsible for your promotion to a freed person. At that time you can choose to either continue farming or come find a new job in Border Town."

"Also, starting from next year, if your harvest next year is the

same as those promoted this year, even if the output is not on the forefront, you will still be freed. In other words, as long as you work hard, you will be able to rid yourself of your status as serfs – as I said, ‘labor creates wealth, labor changes destiny’.” He paused for a moment, looked around and then continued, “I hope that in the coming days, there will be no longer any serfs in Border Town, and everyone will be my real subject.”

The moment Roland’s voice faded, the people’s cheers unceasingly resonated throughout the sky above the Redwater River.

Chapter 265 - The Last Enemy

Timothy entered the Lord of the Port of Clear Water's circular room located at the top of the tower.

Different from the more commonly seen castle's, this tower was both higher and narrower. Apart from dealing with government or for observing the outside, he was afraid that even gathering all of his cabinet ministers here to hold a council meeting was already impossible.

None of the furnishings in the room had been moved, it was as if the owner had just left and would soon return. Facing the entrance was a reddish-brown square table, books were neatly and tidily arranged on it. And in the middle were several unfinished manuscripts and a quill that was inserted into an ink bottle; as if just waiting for someone to come and complete the files.

Taking one step at a time, Timothy walked to the table and sat in the large chair. The seat was covered with a cooling mat that was sewn out of bamboo sticks. Something that was quite suitable for easing the sizzling heat of the final month of summer. A bucket of water had been placed next to the chair, it was evidently used to hold ice, also serving to dispel the room's heat and lower the temperature. However, today's weather was a bit gloomy, there were dark clouds over the sea, which lowered the temperature, and made the room appear to be less stiflingly hot.

Timothy leaned forward, placed his face close to the surface of the tabletop and gently smelled it, filling up his nostrils with a faint and sweet scent – this was Garcia's most loved bluish green

sunflower fragrance. It was produced at the Cold Wind Mountain Ridge, and when compared with rugosa rose and rosemary it had a more unique and refreshing feeling, as if it contained some of the ice from the north.

Only after using something for a long time, would it take over one's smell. There was no doubt that his sister enjoyed sitting on this chair, her hands on this table, either listening to a report or busy writing a decree.

Thinking about this, Timothy couldn't stop himself from laughing.

"Haha...ha...haha...hahahaha ———" In the end, Timothy simply leaned against the back of the chair, raised his head and started to laugh at the top of his voice.

He had finally won!

Garcia had given up Port of Clear Water, and given up the Southern Territory, that was tantamount to giving up the throne of Graycastle.

After receiving news that the Black Sail Fleet was sailing north, he immediately summoned the troops under his command and drove more than five thousand slaves, rats and criminals to the southern border and attacked Garcia's nest at the Port of Clear Water. The only resistance he encountered came from the Sandpeople from the extreme south. Timothy didn't know what kind promise they had agreed on, but they attacked him one after

another, having no fear for their own lives. Moreover, the troublesome point was that they were also in possession of the Berserker Pill.

The battle lasted for nearly half a month, but by exploiting his superior numbers, and repeatedly disrupting his enemy's counterattack, Timothy was able to slowly erode the Sandpeople's defense line. Nearly three thousand of his people had died in this battle of attrition, and if his men hadn't received the support of the pills, Timothy was afraid that his mob wouldn't have dared to set even a single foot on this battlefield. Not to mention ever dare fight against the fierce and barbaric Sandpeople here who had fought to their death.

The final result of the battle was that he had to cross over a layer of corpses to be able to enter Port of Clear Water's Lord Tower.

The title "Queen of Clear Water" was history, the South of Graycastle had finally come back under his control.

"Your Majesty?" Probably from hearing his carefree laughter, the Knight keeping guard outside, pushed open the door and entered the room.

"No harm," Timothy answered and got up. He pointed to the knight and then over to himself, instructing him to follow, and then went through a side door to step on the balcony.

He was immediately hit by the slightly salty sea breeze, which made his gown flutter. It seemed there was a storm approaching

from looking at the dark clouds standing overhead that were growing thicker and thicker.

That's truly unfortunately, Timothy thought, I was planning to see my third sister's port, piers, and the Lords Tower all fall victim to the flames, but now it seems this will be impossible.

The last half year he had constantly been on the battlefield alongside his soldiers, there was hardly one month were he had stayed within King's city. He had entrusted his Imperial Prime Minister to take care of all the government's affairs – although Marquis Wyke had seemed to be very loyal, but loyalty didn't mean that the other was able to forever lock their doorway and resist temptation, Gerald Wimbledon being the best example of this.

He needed to return to King's City as soon as he could to stabilize the undercurrents of political unrest going on over there. The rain in the South would probably go on for several days, days he couldn't waste with waiting over here.

"I will go back to King's City early tomorrow morning," Timothy opened his mouth and declared, "Except for my personal guards and the Knights from King's City, all the other Knights and mercenaries will be handed over to you. Sir Ed Hawse, please take my place in defending the Southern Border. You must not allow the Sandpeople to even set a single foot within Graycastle's borders."

"You... will let me stay here?" The young Knight of the northern Hawse Family asked in surprise, "But I would like to continue to

fight at your side, Your Majesty. I –“

“Knight, by defending the borderland you will also fight for me.” Timothy interrupted, “Listen, there are still many things you need to do, so I have to leave the Southern Territory in the hands of loyal and competent people who are able to deal with the aftermath.”

“But...” Ed was still a bit hesitant.

“I know what you are worried about,” the new King smiled understandingly and patted his shoulders. “Rest assured, you won’t stay here forever. When the matter regarding Port of Clear Water is finished, I will immediately recall you back to King’s City. After all, Graycastle is not unified yet, I still need to recover the Western Territory, and for that, I will need even more Knights who can charge in and break through the enemy’s lines. So, how could I ever forget you here?”

Hearing these reassuring words, the young man looked up with shining eyes, knelt down then said, “As you bid, Your Majesty!”

“Get up,” Timothy said while nodding with satisfaction. “There are three things you have to do next. First, you have to take all the remaining inhabitants of Port of Clear Water into custody and escort them back to King’s City.”

“Don’t you want to hang these traitors?” The Knight asked surprised.

“No, they cannot be considered as real traitors. If they had indeed joined Garcia’s side, they would have long left with the Black Sail Fleet. If I kill these people, it would only suit her more.” However, my third sister’s influence is really beyond my expectation, of the more than 10’000 inhabitants of Port of Clear Water, plus the captive slaves from Eagle City, there were actually only 400 people who didn’t want to leave with her. If not for the Sandpeople’s resistance, the Port of Clear Water would have been no different from an abandoned city.

“Your Majesty is benevolent!”

“The second thing you have to do is burn all the docks, shipyards and the Lords Tower, I want to let everyone in the South see that Garcia, the Queen of Clear Water, has ceased to be. Even if she comes fleeing back, only ruins will be left for her to return to.”

“Yes,” the Knight agreed.

“The last thing I ask is that you gather all the refugees for me.” Timothy looked at the horizon over the sea, then calmly said, “Furthermore, any homeless man, rat, bandit, and even the Sandpeople are acceptable. From the battle of Eagle City until today, the dispute in the Southern Territory has never been quietened down, so you should be able to find a large number of refugees living in the surrounding villages and towns. What kinds of methods you use to gather them doesn’t matter, only that before the war against the West begins you will need to provide me with at least 5’000 men.

Garcia’s escape proved the correctness of his strategy, as the ruler

of more than half of Graycastle's population, he should use them to fight against the rebels — under normal circumstances, with a team of 100 Knights leading an army of several thousand commoners, the Knight's usually wouldn't even need to participate in the battle. Their only responsibility would be the distribution of the pills and commanding the battle. In front of an enemy who had the advantage of absolute numbers, as long as they unceasingly attacked, the enemy would be unable to resist them. If Garcia had shown an unwavering will and decided to defend Port of Clear Water to the death instead of retreating, she would have been bound to be swallowed up by the masses of people turned mad by the pills.

Now he only had one enemy left, Roland Wimbledon in the western territory.

Chapter 266 - Making Up Their Mind

“Your Majesty, do you know why there isn’t any news from my older brother?”

Ed’s question surprised Timothy for a moment, indeed, it had already been two months since he sent Lehman Hawes over to loot the Western Territory. No matter if he traveled further or decided to return, he should already have reported on the situation by now, or returned to King’s City.

Although one of the missions given to Lehmann was “take as much control of the Western Territory as possible”, Timothy thoroughly understood that after the 1500 people took the pills they would become almost entirely useless. Wanting to only rely on them to occupy the Western Territory was a very unlikely situation, so the main mission was to seize Longsong Stronghold, loot the pills in the church, verify the details about the Duke’s battle, then lastly go out to attack Border Town thereby consuming some of Roland’s strength.

He had already used this trick to deal with Garcia, so it could be described as a well-tested tactic of his. Even in the case that he was unable to capture the Port of Clear Water, and his militia was wiped out during the attempt to eliminate the enemy, most of his Knights would still be able to return safely. So as long as he assembled a group of useless people afterwards, they would be able to set out on an attack once again.

But why is there absolutely no news about Lehman Hawes and his group of Knights?

Timothy opened his mouth and slowly said, “Maybe his return was delayed because of the attack on Border Town, or he may be on his way back by now.” He knew, that his reasoning was clearly quite weak, but he still did not want to tell Lehman’s brother the most likely answer.

“Maybe when I get back to King’s City, there will be a message from him waiting for me.”

“Then Your Majesty, at that time, is it possible that I can ask that you...”

“Tell you the news?” Timothy nodded, “Of course, I will send a messenger to deliver it to you.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty!”

The new King leant on the railing, watching the occasionally rays of light which appeared within the black clouds. The sound of thunder came from a far-off place, it wasn’t loud, but rather deep and resounding, as if it struck directly into the heart.

Ed’s question had caused the joy in Timothy’s heart to largely fade away. If it was said that Garcia Wimbledon’s rebellion was as it was meant to be, and that Tilly Wimbledon’s departure had disappointed him greatly, then the action of Roland Wimbledon was something completely unimaginable to him. He had always thought that it would be absolutely unnecessary for him to spend any of his energy on his incompetent younger brother. As long as

he waited for some time, Roland would become fed up with Border Town's impoverished lifestyle and come back to King's City on his own, thus today's very real situation was completely unimaginable.

Staying behind so as to take care of Border Town, safely making it through the Months of Demons, defeating Duke Ryan to seize Longsong Strong, and I have now, even completely lost contact with Lehman and his 1'500 militia. In the end, how is this even possible?

Timothy didn't have a deep understanding regarding his younger brother. In our childhood, no matter if it was Garcia or Gerald, they didn't love playing with him. Even after they became adults, they would only occasionally meet during the palace banquets. However, news related to his naughty and mischievous deeds never stopped, even father wasn't fond of him. Is it possible that he concealed his true nature from the beginning?

As soon as the idea came up, Timothy also rejected it. Even if he is as smart as fifth sister, it would only affect his learning ability and his reactive thinking. During Tilly's childhood, there wasn't any difference between her and an ordinary girl – how can someone be born with the knowledge on how to mask themselves and deceive others? It is inevitable that something must have happened after he had left for Border Town, which caused these changes.

Timothy shook his head, and threw those distracted thoughts to the back of his mind.

“What’s wrong, Your Majesty?”

“No, it’s nothing.” The new King took a breath, “A storm is coming.”

No matter what had happened to him. The situation is still the same. With Border Town’s population and its position, he is already doomed without somewhere to retreat to – he has no port or fleet. And with only the unreachable barbaric wasteland behind him, he can only defend his small corner to the death, waiting until he is completely swept off by my attacks.

“Do you insist on leaving tomorrow?” the Knight asked in fear.

Timothy turned around, “If you stop after encountering some rain, what would you do when you meet a real storm?”

Sooner or later, Roland Wimbledon will kneel beneath my feet and beg for my forgiveness. I will inevitably put Graycastle’s crown on my head. However, all of this is but a side act of a newly started play. The movements and intentions of the Church are becoming increasingly obvious. One day, the Church and Graycastle are bound to clash, that will be my real challenge.

“Go and attend to your own affairs. The sooner you are able to finish the task I’ve given you, the sooner you will be able to return to King’s City.”

“As you bid, Your Majesty.”

Ed walked two steps away, but then turned back to ask. “I almost forgot, may I ask Your Majesty, how do you wish to deal with those who swallowed the pills and haven’t died on the battlefield? They have already taken the pills for the third time.”

“Have them burn along with Port of Clear Water,” Timothy replied expressionlessly.

After the Knight acknowledged his orders and left, Timothy suddenly felt something cold on the tip of his nose. Lifting his head, he saw raindrops falling from the clouds, first there was only some spare droplets, but it became more and more dense, then setting off ripples over the sea’s surface.

The New Holy City at Hermes was at the peak of the Tower of Babel.

“Damn it, truly, f*cking damn it!” Tayfun shouted as he vigorously smashed his fist against the table. “This wh*re of a b*tch! That’s blaspheme! She dares to point her spearhead at the Church!”

This was the first time that Mayne had seen the old bishop lose his self-control, the veins on his forehead had risen in his rage, and his beard was trembling. In general, his sinister appearance looked as if he wanted to swallow his counterpart.

It was quite difficult to imagine that he was the same man as the man who constantly raised complaints regarding Heather, who could not exchange even a few words with her without quarreling the whole afternoon long. However, the moment he saw the content inside the small jewel box sent from the Queen of Clear Water, the old man had burst into a rage.

There had been no pearl in the small jewel box, it had only contained a single cast iron ring –the Bishop’s emblem that had personally been awarded by His Holiness, and it was still attached to a bloodstained finger..

Mayne sighed then reached out for the jewelry box. “Of course she dares, that’s because we also haven’t received the blessing of God – God... only favors the victorious.”

Hearing this sentence, Tayfun suddenly calmed down, then silently went to sit back in his chair, heavily gasping for air, before he was once more able to stiffly ask, “Then, what do you intend to do?”

This was indeed a situation the Church hadn’t encountered in the last hundred years. No one had thought that Garcia would come the whole way up from Graycastle to the Kingdom of Endless Winter, and even send the Black Sail Fleet towards Hermes after having seized the capital. Although the Wolfsheart Kingdom had been on its last breath before being conquered, Mayne still hadn’t hesitated to order the God’s Punishment Army to come back to the Old Holy City.

This city, even without any walls, was the barrier defending the

base under Hermes and they couldn't afford to lose it no matter the price.

After they repelled their offensive, the Black Sail Fleet didn't try to go on and instead returned along the river all the way back to King's City of Endless Winter. The other's intention was quite obvious, as long as the Church dispatched troops attack the Wolfsheart Kingdom, Garcia would attack the Old Holy City from the river. Furthermore, the nobles who had previously been suppressed by the sudden loss of Endless Winter's royal power would now begin to stir. Mayne believed that as long as Garcia promised that they could keep their territories and possessions, all those greedy nobles wouldn't hesitate to support Garcia to become the new Queen of Endless Winter.

Now they had a dilemma which couldn't be easily settled.

But the Church would not bow just because they were facing a difficult situation. Even before he had become an Archbishop, Mayne had already known that the road before him would be a long and thorny one.

“First, the Holy City needs to announce a new Archbishop, so we will first make a list of possible candidates, the final candidate is to be decided by His Holiness,” Mayne slowly stated.

“And the enemy?” Tayfun snorted from his nostrils.

“I will explain everything to His Holiness, do not worry,” he closed his eyes, “His Excellency will execute a holy judgment on

them.”

Chapter 267 - The Fated Ending

Mayne passed through the gloomy corridors before he rode the hanging cage into the depths, arriving at the secret temple inside the gigantic cavity.

His Excellency O'Brien was already waiting at the doorway.

He seemed to have aged since the last time he'd seen him. He had wrinkles spreading out like a spider web from the corners of his inwardly sunken eyes and over his cheeks. However, his smile was still just as soft and filled with concern. Mayne couldn't keep his eyes from becoming wet at the sight. He quickly sunk to his knees, "Your Holiness, we -"

"Rise, child," the Pope's voice was both gentle and calm. "I've heard that you've run into some trouble. Follow me to the hall and we can talk."

Today wasn't the Day of Conversion, so the hall's walls weren't decorated with as many candles as stars in the sky this time. Instead, only a few candles had been placed over in the corner. The Pope returned to his Lord's seat, breathing out in relief after he sat. "Explain, just what happened outside."

Mayne fully realized the heaviness of His Holiness O'Brien's responsibility. It wasn't that His Holiness couldn't find out news from outside of the Holy City, simply that he did not have enough time to pay attention to trivial matter. As a result of this, the three Archbishops were then established, and would coordinate

themselves to manage all of the religious affairs. Making sure that they avoid bothering His Holiness with their matter as much as possible, but the current troublesome situation was something he was unable to solve by himself.

Mayne sharply began to narrate the matters at hand, one piece of news at a time from beginning to end.

“Heather is dead...” After listening to everything, O’Brian remained silent for a very long time, then released a long sigh before saying, “She possessed a keen sense of observation and she was both a clever and devout little girl, I’ve seen her as she slowly grew up...”

“Feel free to grief, Your Holiness.”

“The murderer must be punished,” the Pope nodded. “How is the current situation, are Garcia and the Wolfsheart Kingdom mutually helping each other? Isn’t the new poison showing any effect?”

“During the attack and capture of the Broken Tooth Castle it already showed its effect. After a month passed, all of the stronghold’s defenders had fallen dead, and the Army of Judges could quickly storm the city. They were unable to find almost any living soul within the residential areas. However, for the attack on Wolfsheart City, it seems the poison wasn’t able to have the same influence and the enemy still remains tenaciously resistant.” Mayne reported.

“You made two mistakes,” O’Brien slowly said. “The disease caused by the poison will lead to death within seven to ten days. You should have taken advantage of the illness’ first appearance to attack, then quickly rescued and given medical treatment to the residents inside the city. This would’ve significantly reduced their hostility. Do not forget that what we need the most is to get as much of the population as possible, not a ghost city.

“The second point is that you waited one month until you attacked, although by doing it in this way, you were able to reduce the casualties to a minimum, you also gave the enemy enough time to respond, which allowed them enough time to find a way to cure the disease. The essence of the new poison was the magic to transform demonic beasts. According to what the Canon of Magic says, there are more than 70 kinds of abilities that can restrain the infections, and also more than 30 types which can exterminate it. In the end, it isn’t surprising for there to be such a witch within a city filled with tens of thousands of people.”

“You mean, they colluded with witches–”

“In the end, when facing a life and death crisis, no one will care whether they are the Devil’s minions or not,” the Pope muttered.

“No matter if those witches took the initiative to come out by themselves, or if they were unmasked and forced to treat the plague, both possibilities sound like bad news for the Church. If they really can stop the momentum of our attack, it is inevitable that the witches’ reputation is bound to undergo some dramatic changes, even so far... that they could be regarded as heroes.”

“This is all my fault,” Mayne said while lowering his head.

“It certainly was a mistake, but not a grave one. The reason you used this tactic was to reduce the losses of our Army of Judges and God’s Punishment Army,” O’Brien used his scepter to knock Mayne on the shoulder, “Furthermore, the fact that Graycastle’s 3rd Princess Garcia and the Wolfsheart Kingdom are working together is also an opportunity for us.”

“Op...portunity?” the Bishop asked shocked.

“That’s right! This way we will have the opportunity to catch everything in one net,” O’Brien stood up, “You, come with me.”

Escorted by guards, Mayne followed the Pope out of the Pivotal Secret Institution, and they slowly walked further into the depths of the cave. The gloomy rays of light coming from the immense God’s Punishment Stones illuminated the path beneath their feet – gradually, becoming darker and darker, until Mayne was no longer able to keep himself from looking back, only to see that the Pivotal Secret Temple and the God’s Punishment Stone was already great distance behind them. In the end, it even became necessary for the guards to light up torches to prevent them from stumbling over the rubble that was on the ground.

“We are... going where?”

“We are already there, child,” His Holiness O’Brian halted his footsteps, breathing a bit hurriedly, “Sigh... I’m getting old, from just this short journey, I have already expended such a large

amount of effort...”

A guard came up to support him, “Your Holiness, please permit me to carry you.”

“That’s not necessary, a short break will be good enough,” after saying this, the Pope stood in place and tried to catch his breath, he then commanded, “Light the brazier.”

At this moment the Bishop noticed that there were a few tall towers erected beside the stone road, but if the guards with their torches hadn’t stepped close to them, it would have been hard for the average person to find these hidden metal towers within the darkness.

The guards climbed the ladders and lit the oil in the basin at the top. It immediately produced several groups of dazzling flames. Mayne first had to narrowly squint his eyes and slowly adapt to the change in lighting, before he was able to look ahead.

In the flickering light, a dusty canvas appeared in front of everyone, it was tall and bulging, and was apparently covering a something large.

“It was originally planned that we would wait two more years before we took this out to help resist against the then even more fierce demonic beasts’ attacks, but it now seems we have to shift its appearance to an earlier date.” O’Brien waved his hand then commanded, “Remove the cloth.”

“This is...” When the canvas fell, Mayne couldn’t believe his eyes. Before him stood a huge, fierce some four-wheeled iron carriage; just its wheels were already taller than he was. It did not have the appearance of an ordinary carriage either. Rather, it had a ferocious looking horn-shaped metal ramp, the frame was made out of beast bones, and the areas between the frames had been closed with barbed bone shields, with a size of three to four large doors.

There were two perfectly straight iron poles with pointed ends, one on the left and one on the right, which extended through the openings in the shield and pointed forward, as if ready to fire off arrows. Moreover, another dozen of these metal poles were hanging from both sides of the iron carriage, each were as thick as his own thigh, with its dark and metallic luster shining under the brazier light.

“The canon called this, ‘Siege Beast’.” The Pope walked to the side of the carriage and patted the hard iron poles, “It relies on magic power to operate, and needs the power of three to four witches for it to run smoothly. The Siege Beast’s striking distance is far beyond that of a trebuchet or ballista, and for the typical city wall, it is very difficult to resist the destructible power of these iron arrows. The giant trees they use to build ships with are the same as thin pieces of paper in front of this. No matter if it is for destroying the strong city walls of Wolfsheart City or to prevent the Black Sail Fleet from advancing further, would both be very easy if we make use of this.”

“This... is it also a weapon developed by the secret temple?”

“No,” O’Brian shook his head, “You should be able to guess, this comes from our enemies – it is from the Devil’s from hell. This is also why the Church hides the Siege Beast here deep within the cave. Remember, when you use it, be sure to hide your whereabouts as much as possible, don’t let any civilian see it.

“I understand,” Mayne said as he lowered his head.

How it is possible for witches to be able to manipulate the Devil’s weapon? Do they possess the same kind of magic as humans? He forced down all of his doubts and did not continue asking. Obviously, only after he became the new Pope would he be eligible to understand these things.

“Also, to avoid Garcia and the Wolf King from fleeing again, I will be dispatching two Purified Ones to aid you during combat,” the Pope said.

“No one can escape from their grasp... Go forth, bring back the blood of those blasphemers for the sake of Heather’s farewell dinner.”

His Holiness is dispatching the Purified Ones! He was shocked to his core, the witches who were both raised and allowed to survive by the Church were called Purified Ones. But to become His Holiness’ subordinate, only the most powerful out of ten thousand was selected, like those who had abilities not even recorded within the Canon of Magic. Comparing them to the troops under Heather, Tayfun, and himself, would be like comparing the sky to the earth! With His Holiness now personally stating that they would be unable to escape, the ending of the two was already fated to

happen.

“As you bid, Your Holiness,” Mayne answered in excitement.

Chapter 268 - The First Plenary Session

(Part 1)

Roland held Border Town's first high-level plenary session in the castle's drawing hall.

Compared to the time when he had held it with Barov and his ten apprentices in name only, the City Hall nowadays had expanded to a large group consisting of nearly one hundred people. The group contained nobles, surrendered knights, squires, as well some natives who had completed the primary education and received their diploma.

Thanks to the growth of the population, various departments could be formed in succession, which caused the City Hall to finally reach a size the Prince was satisfied with. No longer was it as before, where he had to do everything on his own, at present in the case of a simple policy or program, as long as he explained the concept to them, the new City Hall was able to distribute it according to the department and manage to complete the task, something which filled Roland with a sense of gratification.

The participants of the first high-level meeting were all the heads of departments, namely there was the Minister of Agriculture, Sirius Daly; Minister of Education, Scroll; the Minister of Chemical Industry, Kyle Sichi (temporary); Minister of Construction, Karl van Bate; the Head of the Army, Iron Axe; and finally, the City Hall Premier Minister, Barov Mons. The Ministry of Industry was still personally managed by Roland. After all, except him, no one else knew what industrialization looked like.

A bucket of ice water was placed next to everyone, releasing bursts of cold air – Candle had placed an enchantment on the ice cubes, which preserved them within the water for at least the whole morning. Even though the sun was shining fiercely outside, the castle hall still maintained its cool and refreshing temperature.

“Then let’s start with each department reporting on its recent situation,” Roland took a kettle from the bucket, and poured himself a cup of ice water, “The first one is the Ministry of Agriculture.”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness,” Sirius answered, he stood up and saluted, then spread out a roll of paper he had prepared in advance. “Currently we have acquired around [17’000 hu](#) of grain, which is already enough to satisfy the townsfolk until next year’s last month of summer. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture has according to your request also purchased the surplus grains in accordance to the market value. However, this amount is far less than the amount we’ve gained, for now, it is only accounts for [4’500 hu](#).”

17’000 hú = 850’000 liter = 187’000 gallons

4’500 hú = 225’000 liter = 49’500 gallons

The so-called “hu” was a commonly used wheat weighing unit during ancient times, measured by using a deep basket made out of thin bamboo. Therefore, even after he heard these numbers, he still didn’t know how he was supposed to convert them into kilograms or liters. Fortunately, this wasn’t the important point; the crucial point was that they had enough food to feed the all of the townsfolk.

The critical fact laid in the second aspect, if the Ministry of Agriculture took 7/10, it would mean that the serfs had 3/10 which they could sell themselves and accumulated to [7'000 hu](#), but the discrepancy was much larger than the amount of grain needed to set aside as foodstuff and seeds for the next year. In other words, some serfs had not sold the remaining 30% of the food to the City Hall and instead chosen to hoard it in wooden sheds.

7'000 hú = 350'000 liter = 77'000 gallons

Although he had already anticipated a situation such as this beforehand, seeing it turn out this way still caused him to let out a gentle sigh. Their purpose in hoarding the grain was apparent, they were speculating to resell it at a profit later – for example, if Border Town gave birth to a food shortage, or was struck by a natural disaster. They would be able to sell the food at prices much higher than the market price, an increase of ten times wouldn't be impossible.

This was also the reason why Roland had decided that the City Hall would hold a monopoly over the grain transaction and also why the buyer must first show their identity card. The grain operation was related to Border Town's stability, in case the grain transaction was unable to create a surplus during the early period and the sale wasn't restricted, it would likely lead to speculators acquiring and hoarding the food and in that way artificially increasing the food's price. However, by using a system of limited sales and only selling to people who had an ID, while at the same time stopping any other sales channels, Roland was able to keep the food price at a steady position.

“Your Highness, why don't you force the serfs to sell their grain?” Sirius asked puzzled, “In any case, it's not like the law

permits them to give it to other people.”

“Because the grain is their property, how they choose to handle it is their choice,” Roland replied. “I never set a rule not allowing the serfs to hold on to their own food. You can also understand it as, ‘as long as it isn’t prohibited, it is allowed’.”

On hearing his reply, Sirius looked somewhat puzzled by it, apparently not knowing how he was supposed to interpret this sentence. And he wasn’t the only one confused, most of the others were also frowning, the only exception to this was Barov, who was currently showing a thoughtful expression.

“Is there anything else to report?” Roland drank a mouthful of iced water. Only with time would they be able to understand the concept of emphasizing rules and procedure. Or putting it another way, the moment they were able to comprehend it, they could be regarded as a new generation of qualified officials. Of course, this could also easily lead to another extreme, like the emergence of bureaucracy. However, bureaucracy was still better than confusion, disorder, and people behaving unscrupulously.

“Uh... yes,” Sirius Daly flung his head back, “Now that the fields have been harvested, I do not know how to organize next year’s fallow and plow plan.”

“No, the serfs can endlessly cultivate their lands, so we will continue to plant wheat next year,” Roland waved his hand, “Those piles of manure to the side of the fields were gathered in preparation of fertilizing the land. In the following days, you will start to instruct the serfs to shovel it into the fields, and fully mix

it into the soil, completely clear it and make place for new piles of excrements.” With the summer’s high temperature and humid weather, it had only needed two months before becoming well-rotted compost, however, during the winter season it will usually take four months. So by the beginning of spring of next year, not only would the soil’s quality be increased by the first batch of compost, but Roland would also have readied a second batch of compost which could be used as base fertilizer. Because of this, there was no need for a fallow plan.

Not speaking about high-end fertilizer, just using human’s and animal’s excrement as fertilizer was already a vast improvement for the agriculture.

“Well, if this is what you order.” He touched his head, “Also... Your Highness, I’m afraid that with such large amounts of wheat, it won’t be enough to only lean on one or two stone grinding mills. So, I want to apply for the construction of a mill next to the Redwater River, preferably a steam powered one.”

“That’s pretty good,” Roland nodded. This was a new breakthrough – there was finally someone other than himself who wanted to try and use the new power. “First of all, you should forward your plan to Barov, and after obtaining the funding for it, you then have to determine a detailed plan together with the Ministry of Construction.”

“All right, Your Highness” Sirius agreed, “The last point is regarding the promotion to freed people. At present, five hundred and sixteen people have obtained the qualification for the promotion. Because the amount of wheat was divided and

transferred on the spot, no one has put up any objections. I have already reported the list to Lord Barov.” Then he got up and saluted again, “That concludes my report.”

“Well done,” Roland clapped twice to show his encouragement. It seemed that the former young Knight of the Wolf Family had not only adapted to his new life in Border Town, but also obtained the manners of the City Hall. And so, could be turned into an excellent propaganda model after a little packaging, in that way playing a small role in attracting nobles or knights of Longsong Stronghold in the future.

The second to give their report was Scroll. She had tied her long hair to the back of her head, and wore a clean and tidy white shirt, matched with a simple and decorate free black long skirt, which made her look both mature and capable. Seeing her today, it was hard for him to imagine that half a year ago, she was still a witch living in exile so as to hide away from the Church.

“At present, there are two batches of people who are in the process of completing their Primary Education, a total of eighty-five people. Most of them previously studied at the college run by Mr. Karl.” With her ability to have a highly retentive memory, she had no need to prepare any data for the report beforehand, a point which made Roland feel very envious. “Forty-six of them choose to go to work in the City Hall, twenty-one people decided to go to the bicycle factory, thirteen people decided to join the First Army,” pausing for a moment she continued, “There are also five applicants for a post at the chemical laboratory.”

Five people? Roland could not help but look over towards Kyle

Sichi, merely to see the latter's complexion clearly didn't appear to be that good. It seems that the propaganda effect of the Honor and Award Ceremony is far less than I expected. I'm afraid that some parts of the three recently created laboratories are going to have to lie idle in the near future.

Fortunately, the employment rate is at least at one hundred percent; Roland tried to comfort himself.

Chapter 269 - The First Plenary Session

(Part 2)

When it was the Ministry of Chemical Industry's turn, Kyle snorted, "Your Royal Highness, I hope you can find the real head of this department as soon as possible, I do not want to attend this kind of meeting for a second time."

"..." Roland secretly rolled his eyes, after becoming a leader, he had discovered that it was important for him to selectively ignore words sometimes. Is it that easy to find a person who has talent for both alchemy and chemistry? "Do you have any idea how to mass produce the two acids?"

"No," Kyle shrugged his shoulders, "And because of that, I have to spend more energy and staff on researching this topic, so rather than sitting here and wasting my time." After spending such a long time in Border Town, he had also acquired some of Roland's vocabulary, "In case you insist that I should give an account, I can only say that the laboratory is lacking personnel, the more people that come to us, the better. In addition, regarding the recently five added people, although they aren't as old, they can still be counted as clever, it seems that the Primary Education you implemented is still somewhat useful."

Well, the person with the most disrespectful way of talking was probably the chief alchemist. However, taking each other's age into account, and the degree of enthusiasm he showed for chemical experiments, Roland did not feel any resentment towards him for this. It was also important to remember that after going through the explosion and after being completely healed by Nana, his first

and largest reaction was that he was glad that he could now conduct experiments without the slightest of scruple, and then even planned to taste the different flavors of the acids, who other than he would have such a fanatical enthusiasm to their work?

“All right... you will continue to research, and I’ll have Barov think of a method to fill in the staff shortage.”

“Oh, by the way, Your Highness,” Kyle opened his mouth again. “Were you able to compile your ‘Intermediate Chemistry’? If you could give me some details, maybe I can think of a method for the large-scale production earlier.”

“I already said at the Honor and Award Ceremony, so long as you train enough apprentices and assistants to fill the new laboratories, I will give you the book,” Roland said, spreading his hand out towards him. In fact, at present, he had not written even the first line. Just the Elementary Chemistry had already consumed all his knowledge of chemistry. He already feared, that even if he racked his brain for it, he would still be unable to fill more than a few pages of the Intermediate Chemistry.

The fourth person to report was Karl van Bate, who was from the Ministry of Construction.

“First of all, I want to thank Miss Scroll,” Karl said, as he nodded towards Scroll, “I’m really glad to hear that the children I’ve taught were able to graduate smoothly.”

Compared to the chief alchemist, the stonemason’s

communication skills could be said to be as different as the sky to the earth. Scroll nodded in return before replying with, “I should be the one thanking you.”

Then Karl opened the records he was carrying with him and in a methodical manner began to describe: “At present, the town’s projects are steadily advancing. The main projects are the Kingdom Avenue, the Redwater Bridge, the new residential area and the new city wall. The amount of people working on the construction of the Kingdom Avenue has already reached four thousand five hundred people, half of them have come from Longsong Stronghold and according to current predictions, they should be finished by spring next year. Regarding the status of the Redwater Bridge, currently they are still carrying out the construction of the underground concrete wall. The residential district is already extending to the old city wall, and there are currently approximately one thousand people busy constructing it. As long as the supply of the cement and bricks are ensured, it should be possible to complete the task of moving all the eastern refugees into town before the arrival of the Months of Demons.”

Since Karl usually informed Roland on a daily basis about the recent developments of the projects, his report this time was very simple. He didn’t even mention matters such as the expansion of the castle area and the construction of the witch dorm. And after deciding on a good position for the new city wall, it was being constructed by Lotus herself, with a daily progress of approximately one hundred meters.

“You’ve worked hard,” Roland nodded, the Ministry of Construction, regardless of whether it was the staff or the amount of allocated funds, was the department with the largest amounts.

Therefore, its achievements were also the greatest. “Those handymen coming from Longsong Stronghold, besides speeding up the construction they are also promoting Border Town’s preferential treatment policy. Furthermore, after a year of work, those handymen can be regarded as qualified craftsmen, and so the number of people who want to go back should be kept to as little as possible.”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness,” Karl agreed.

“Then the next one... is Iron Axe.”

It was Iron Axe’s first time participating in this kind of meeting, and so he seemed to be a little out of place. He cleared his throat, “Your Royal Highness, the army has two main things it wishes to report. First of all, the Second Army has completed their basic training, and they are now ready to be sent to the Longsong Stronghold. And secondly, in the wake of adding new blood, the First Army now has eight hundred and twenty-five people. Putting aside the three hundred and fifty people of the artillery team, the rest of the soldiers have all been equipped with revolving rifles. That’s all I have to say.” Then finished his report with a military salute.

“That sounds pretty good. Have the Second Army set out tomorrow and be sure to place reliable people at the important ranks. After reaching the stronghold, they aren’t allowed to stop their daily training and ideological education. Furthermore, I expect a weekly report to be sent back to Border Town.” Roland instructed.

The last to report was Barov, he first looked at everyone, then slowly saluted Roland before reporting, “Your Royal Highness, ever since the previous payment to Margaret’s Chamber of Commerce for the refugee transportation and the money spent on Theo’s mission, the City Hall’s gold stock has declined very badly. Coupled with the bumper harvest and the Ministry of Agriculture’s acquisition of grain according to the set market price, it has resulted in an inventory of barely 2000 gold royals, this can be considered as a relatively dangerous boundary.”

Two thousand gold royals... compared with last year’s winter it undoubtedly was a huge sum of money, but Roland was also perfectly aware that Border Town’s situation was also no longer the same as it was back then. Even just for the Ministry of Construction, already burdened Border Town with the huge expenditure of paying for the five thousand workers. There was also the high salary for the First Army, factories, chemical laboratory, and City Hall, which also required a large amount of money.

In other words, Border Town might have been earning money quickly, but it was also spending the money just as quickly. Even under the circumstances that large parts of the materials and machinery were self-sufficient.

“I am aware of this, but at the beginning of next month, when Margaret’s caravan arrives in town, we will be able to obtain a huge income through the sale of the steam engines,” Roland responded. “Furthermore, the purchase of food and the transport of the refugees aren’t daily expenses. I’m sure that during the next six months, the treasury should be able to improve steadily, there is no reason for you to worry too much about it.” He paused. “also,

I plan to raise the salary of everyone here.”

“Raise the salary?” Barov got startled and stared blankly at Roland.

“That’s correct, the City Hall is no longer an institution only run by a dozen people, and your workload has increased significantly, so your salary will also naturally rise.” The Prince smiled and then continued to say, “From this month onwards, I will increase your monthly salary to five gold royals, and according to this ratio, the payment for your apprentices and assistants will also go up uniformly. Be at ease, the needed fund doesn’t accumulate too much, it is not more than 20 to 30 gold royals.”

Although a salary of five gold royals for this kind of position in the City Hall couldn’t be counted as generous, but Roland knew, that what Barov enjoyed even more than the salary, was being in charge of Border Town’s revenues and expenditure and providing them with the according statistics. Furthermore, since he had yet to set any regulatory ministries, Barov could get hundred times his current salary. But so far, he had not seen any signs of corruption from Barov.

Of course, apart from relying on the other people’s conscious, Roland could also always count on Nightingale’s ability to maintain the department’s integrity. No one could conceal their bad behavior from her gaze.

“In addition, there is one thing you may already know,” Roland continued. “By the end of the Months of Demons, I plan to officially establish a city here. In other words, Border Town will be

upgraded into an official city. The city's west side will stretch until the barbarian wasteland, the eastern border will be Longsong Stronghold, while the southern end will be the hills and the ocean. With the city walls and the mountains as a natural barrier, the area will be far larger than King's City or any other city in the Four Kingdoms.

“So you still need to pay particular attention and improve your work, to meet the attitude that is required to establish a city,” Roland paused and then emphasized every word, “I hope that our city, even while in a boundless winter, can stay as warm as during spring.”

Chapter 270 - High Pressure Air Bottle

After the meeting concluded, Roland and Barov both stayed behind.

“You also saw it, currently people are crucial to the chemical laboratory and Graycastle Industry, and I also intend on starting the mass production of soap and perfume soon, which will require a lot of additional staff.” The Prince said. “But it will be at least a year before the greater part of the townsfolk pass the primary education examination. Furthermore, even by taking all of them into account, there still won’t be more than 600 to 700 people, that just isn’t enough. I need more people.”

“In case we enlist people from the stronghold...”

“No,” Roland interrupted, “Next year, after Border Town has upgraded to the status of a city, the stronghold and Border Town will be fused into one entity. Therefore, it would be the equivalent of the moving money out from your left pocket into your right pocket; so, I will need more people from outside the Western Territory.”

“This...” Barov looked somewhat troubled and worriedly suggested, “I am afraid that isn’t such good idea to solve it. If you go to others cities to fish for workers, the local Lords would definitely not sit by and idly watch as it happens.”

“Do not go to the cities,” Roland said. Then he stretched his finger toward the cup, dipped it into the iced water and then

moved it over the table while saying, “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but since the end of the Months of Demons, Graycastle has constantly been at war. Including several charges which had been led by Timothy against the Southern Territory, resulting in Eagle City being destroyed from a fire, and leaving the surrounding cities and towns severe damaged. Then there was also the subjugation of the Northern Region, where they stripped the Duke Ise of his title and territory. And lastly the marine attack against the Eastern Region,” he beat two times against the tabletop, leaving a group of water stains, “Which seriously impacted the Sea Wind Region, Valencia, and Shivering Crow Castle, not even mentioning all the small towns in the surroundings. Just by looking at all the people who’ve fled to King’s City you can already see how seriously the impact was on Graycastle’s population.”

“What do you mean...” Barov revealed a thoughtful expression.

“Go out and spread propaganda about the Western Region,” The Prince smoothed out the water then explained in more detail, “During the last six months, only the Western Region remained peaceful. There has been no forced recruitment, nor has it been hit by the flames of war. Especially since Timothy so wantonly uses commoners to attack, he will definitely recruit and even force the civilians of each region. Who can guarantee that next time that fate won’t fall on their head? So you have to propagandize that the only calm and peaceful place completely isolated from the chaos of war is the Western Region.”

“I think I got it,” Barov said after pondering about his next words, “You plan to attract the civilians of other cities by not pressing them into service, or forcing them into labor, and furthermore, by providing them with shelter, food, and stable

work?”

“Almost,” Roland said with a smile and nodded. His active thinking and ability to find the key points is one of the Assistant Minister’s strongest points. “However, one of the key points you need to propagandize is the excellent treatment that literate people will enjoy. I think that these places definitely have some Knights and nobles who have no way out and because of this are unwilling to come to the western region to try their luck.”

Whether it was small villages or towns, they were almost all territories of minor nobility. And during peacetime, even if the land was small and barren, and the management poor, supervising a few acres of land would always manage to fill their stomach. But during the time of war, something which severely impacted the population, it was hard for them to survive. At those times, if there was a stable and peaceful destination for them, it would really prove tempting to most of them. Even if there was no one who could safeguard their territory and keep it from being occupied by others, they would only have to endure these days of war. Afterward, they could use their money to recruit some mercenaries and go back to take over their territory once again.

As for how to advertise, Roland believed that Barov would have his ways.

“But Your Highness, by doing it this way and helping the personnel to settle down will be very expensive, furthermore, the acquisition of the grain cannot be interrupted,” Barov hesitantly said, “In case the caravan encounters some accidents, the City Hall’s treasury will quickly dry up.”

“Um... what you’ve said sounds reasonable,” Roland touched his chin, the most important task of new established political powers was to create trust and confidence of it within the people’s hearts. If they were suddenly caught in a situation where they were unable to pay their salary, this current excellent situation would take a sudden turn and rapidly worsen. “Well, in this case, you should head back first and continue with your usual task. We will wait until the caravan has arrived in Border Town and the completion of the transaction next month. When the treasury is filled once more, we will speak about the implementation of the plan again.”

“As you bid, Your Royal Highness,” Barov placed his hand on his chest.

After finishing the mission briefing, Roland returned to his office and began thinking about how to complete Margaret’s balloon order.

With a price of one thousand gold royals for each balloon, its price was even higher than that of the steam engine, while its production cost was actually lower. The airbag was mainly a drawn picture by Soraya while the hemp rope and bamboo basket were bargain-priced goods. In fact, Roland had already created a prototype and tested it in the factory courtyard: A hydrogen balloon which could carry Lighting and Maggie simultaneously and ascend into the sky.

After repeated consideration, he finally decided to abandon the idea of a hot air balloon fueled by coal gas. The needed equipment would use up too much space, and the manufacturing process

would also be very troublesome. Moreover, Roland would have to import that coal from other cities, which for a small-scale production would be extremely cost-ineffective, far inferior to hydrogen which was so much easier to facilitate.

He coated the test product with a single-sided water coating, which ensured that even after being burned, nothing would happen to the paper. As a result, the whole air sac had hardly any weight while its flexibility was very outstanding. In the experiment, after inflating the balloon, it would fear neither rain, impact, or fire. Maggie even turned into several kinds of birds to throw vicious attacks against the balloon but it was still unable to leave even a small trace. Only by using an iron needle were they able to pierce through the millimeter-thick coating. And since the construction of the air sac was very lithe, a hydrogen balloon with merely a diameter of about two meters was already enough to carry an adult.

The only difficulty laid in how they would solve the gasification problem of the high-pressure hydrogen bottle.

Selling a DC motor for the electrolysis of water was impossible. A motor connected to a steam engine could inflate all hydrogen balloons, which was obviously not that cost-effective. If he wanted a steady flow of gold royals from the hands of the wealthy and powerful merchants, he would have to find a way of create high-pressure bottles which could be refilled repeatedly.

The air bottle itself was not difficult to build. The usage of secondary material could be made up with the wall's thickness, thus using pig iron and wrought iron was good enough and with

Anna personally being the one to manufacture it, processing the bottle accurately also wouldn't be a problem. The critical point was in the fact that the later generations of air bottles had a pressure level of 20mpa or higher, wishing to reach that by relying on a bicycle pump was undoubtedly nothing but a fantasy, even the help of ten Qilins wouldn't change this, he at least had to obtain a high-pressure pump. And having a high enough pressure inside the bottle wasn't enough if there wasn't a way to fill the hydrogen balloon with it later.

The high-pressure air pump was divided into a piston compressor and a turbine compressor, the former belonged to the internal combustion engine technology tree, while the later fell under the scope of turbine engines. No matter what type he would try to research and develop, they would both be time-consuming and laborious projects. Until late in the afternoon, Roland finally came up with a simple solution: A simple self-inflating bottle.

The inspiration for it came from a news article he had seen before: A street vendor had been selling hydrogen balloons and used a modified liquefied gas tank to store the hydrogen, which in the end resulted in an explosion. The cause of this laid in the problem that the peddler had used diluted sulfuric acid and aluminum to create hydrogen inside of the bottle, but hadn't correctly calculated the amount of reaction. Which resulted in the issue that the pressure inside the tank had become too large and had broken the bottle.

Thus, the self-inflating method was to pour diluted sulfuric acid and an [active metal](#) into the bottle so as to replace the hydrogen. The commonly used metal in laboratories was zinc, while the one used to create most of the hydrogen was aluminum, both materials

were not accessible during this era. So Roland still intended to use Lucy's power to dismantle iron and purify it into high iron. The problem of its slow reaction speed at room temperature could also be improved by using heat and enlarging the contact area (for example using thin iron pieces or iron powder), while an inner coating could resist the corrosion effect of the acid liquid that was inside the bottle.

Thinking until here, he immediately drew a simple sketch on paper. In order to reduce the air leakage, the high-pressure bottle needed to be made as one whole piece, with only a raised threaded hole at the top, which could be screwed into a valve with a gas nozzle.

By tightening up the mouthpiece after injecting the reactant, the continuously generated gas would have nowhere to go, which would result in that the pressure inside the bottle would reach a very impressive level. As long as they unscrewed the valve, the hydrogen would pour out directly into the airbag. And the refill process would also be quite convenient. After removing the gas nozzle and drying the remaining liquid over a stove, the ferrous sulfate crystals inside could be cleaned out before it could be refilled with new reactant.

Taking into account that diluted sulfuric acid is also an alchemy product, the refill price obviously couldn't be set too low.

With fifty gold royals for one charge, and after buying ten charges get one free, Roland thought.

Chapter 271 - Elements

Kyle Sichi returned home after finishing the day's experiments, his wife had already baked flatbread, made him some mushroom soup, and poured him a glass of white wine.

The latter two were both goods that were sold at the convenience market, especially this sort of huge white mushrooms, which were just like the words on the signboard described them as: you won't find any fresher, or more fragrant delicacy, after one taste you too will discover this to be true. If you eat even one piece, you will find it difficult to forget its full and unique flavor.

Of course, its price was also very alarming, one palm sized mushroom required one silver royal. If it weren't for his good salary, Kyle would never be able to bear buying such an expensive food. But there were also a lot of other things similar to this, such as perfumed soap and mirrors. As long one had enough money, their life in Border Town would be much more comfortable than that of an average noble.

Roland was simply deep beyond measure, this was also the deepest of point he felt.

After he finished the evening meal. His wife handed him a letter.

"This is?"

"The letter was delivered by the guard this afternoon, at that time you still hadn't returned from work," she answered, as she

started to clean the tableware, “He said that it had apparently come from Redwater City.”

“Is that so?” Kyle asked as he entered his study. He cut open the seal using a knife then removed the parchment before spreading it out.

To his surprise, the first sentence was actually, “Dear respected mentor.”

Seeing that Chavez was the one that had sent the letter, he couldn't help but smile. He sat at his desk and began to read through it carefully.

Initially, when Kyle left the Redwater City Alchemic Workshop, another alchemist named Capola had become the new chief. But that person had been narrow-minded, and after obtaining the crystal glass formula left behind by Kyle, he not only claimed towards the Lord that this was his and Kyle's work, he even excluded Chavez either intentionally or unintentionally from the alchemy experiment group.

Within the letter, Chavez complained, that this was perhaps because he wanted to borrow the idea of the double stone acid method from him, but in the end didn't want to announce the achievement to the other side. Nowadays, several other alchemist apparently had also begun to intentionally or otherwise shun Chavez, which caused Kyle to feel quite troubled.

Kyle could roughly understand what those people must be

thinking, Chavez was the youngest alchemist of the refining room, so many people still thought that it had only been by relying on luck and Kyle's appreciation for him as a discipline that he had been able to stand out of the crowd. But the chief alchemist could only snort disdainfully at that sort of view. Saltpeter and green vitriol were both everyday things, so why had it been Chavez and no one else who had discovered the double stone acid method? This point alone should already sufficiently explain this issue. Perception, memory, making assumptions without fear, and being diligent during experimentation were all indispensable elements, in the end this young man's innate skill was even above his own.

At the end of the letter, Chavez had attached two alchemic formulas, claiming they were two of his recently discovered acids he wished to share with his mentor. But even at the first glance, Kyle could see that the essence of these two formulas was just the creation of salt when acids and alkali react with one another, this was the kind of recipe he could write down dozens of times in a single breath.

With a sigh, Kyle Sichi put the letter down and glanced at the "Elementary Chemistry" laying on his table.

Everything had changed with His Highness and his so-called "ancient books". If it hadn't been for them, he was afraid, that he would still be the same as Chavez, still aimless, and bewilderedly wandering through the primal chaos, hoping to find some clay on the surface and still regard it as some kind of treasure.

Taking the book, Kyle immediately went to the last page.

It showed a table which was neatly divided into a hundred square box.

Every time he looked at the table, he couldn't help but get goosebumps all over his body and feel a hard to describe reverence... and fear from within his heart.

Every box had a small serial number in the upper left corner which without a miss arrived at 118 at the end. Beside the first two rows, the majority of the boxes were blank, except for some symbols in the middle. For example, twenty-six: iron, twenty-nine: copper.

The name of this table was: "Periodic Table of Elements".

While holding the book in his trembling hands, the chief alchemist had asked Roland about the contents of those blank boxes, merely to receive the answer that they had originally been filled, but he was unable to remember them.

If at that time, the other party hadn't been His Royal Highness, he most likely would have taken the book and thrown it into the other's face.

According to the records in the book, this table contained all existing elements on earth. If there existed a Canon of Alchemy, there was no doubt that this would be the most dazzling chapter in the whole book. What scared him the most was the question, what type of person was able to draw such a chart? And if they had already done this before, what were alchemists then supposed to

be regarded as? They seemed to be merely a gang of children sitting within the silt and piling up some rocks.

Kyle suddenly thought of His Royal Highness' promise, in case he was also able to call Chavez over, and also pull over the group of recently recruited apprentice, maybe he would be able to fill those three new laboratories. In that way, his dream of laying his hands on the "Intermediate Chemistry" would become a reality.

Thinking until here, he immediately took out a piece of white paper and began to write his response.

In fact, at the meeting when His Royal Highness had asked him whether he had any clue relating to large-scale acid production, he hadn't told him the truth. Because the content was complex and lengthy, it would have been a waste of time doing so. The most important matter was that he still didn't know whether his program worked or not. After all, he had based his production method entirely on the elements and reaction principles written within the book.

Compared with the previous alchemy test, this hypothesis was like a child's nonsensical mutterings in their sleep. Wanting to use materials he had never seen before, together with an unheard of reaction method, to create something which seemed to have no similarity with the raw materials, only because they had the same type of element.

But within Kyle's heart he still had a faint premonition, it felt like this method might actually be feasible!

After all, within the previous hundreds of permutation experiments, there had not been one time which where the book's statement wasn't correct.

With the initial plan concluded, the next step was for him to complete a full set of theoretical tests within the laboratory. Since His Highness had said that the industrial method could be used for large-scale production, it should also be possible to reproduce the results in the laboratory.

Kyle soon finished the letter, he didn't waste any words on consoling Chavez, and instead straightforwardly told his previously marvelous discipline about alchemic knowledge that was both available and measurable. Kyle believed that there didn't exist any alchemist who was brimming with the interests of a wise man, that would let the opportunity to seek truth pass them by.

After folding the letter, placing it into an envelope and sealing it with wax, Kyle could do nothing other than wait for the next day to give the message to a traveling salesman who wanted to deliver it.

After all this, his line of sight once again moved to the periodic table.

Thinking about those blank boxes which would never be filled again, Kyle felt as if his life no longer had any joy left to offer him. But fortunately, His Royal Highness had said one short phrase which had made his heart surge, and until today those words were

still pacing back and forth within his ears.

“Don’t put on that look, the periodic table arranges each element in a regular pattern according to an underlying law. You can fill it up by yourself.”

“Regular... pattern? Do you mean that those unknown elements can also be deducted, just like the derivation of an alchemical formula?”

“That’s right, even if you have never seen them before, you can still describe their appearance and characteristics.”

“That rule, what is it?”

“Do you want to know? It is written in the ‘Intermediate Chemistry’.”

Chapter 272 - North Slope Mine

The further down into the mine, the more humid the environment became.

Sylvie was holding up a torch and gingerly evading the drop of water falling towards her head as she led the group further into the mine. Even without any light, her Eye of Truth wasn't something that could be stopped by the darkness. Thus she merely used the torch to save her magic power.

"There is another fork in the road," Nightingale who was walking at the front said after she stopped, "Which cave is this already?"

"Twenty-third after passing the first fork from the entryway," Lightning answered, as she took a look at the records.

"I hope this is the last one," Sylvie grumbled, then completely opened her magic eye, "The left side... spreads away from the mining area, there is no ore there. The right side... is the same."

Lightning wrote down the results then announced, "In that case, those caverns were also the last gates we had to inspect."

"Come on," Nightingale said and went from the front to the end, leading everyone back. It didn't seem that her ability was as simple as invisibility, Sylvie could only see faint changes in Nightingales' magic power, but was ultimately unable to capture her figure or movement. According to Lightning's introduction, she was the

strongest fighting witch.

This may also be the reason why Roland had her to follow them. There were rumors that the mine had once been a nest for ancient monsters, and there had already been several events of miners going missing. Before their departure, His Highness had also told them several times that they had to be careful and that in case they couldn't determine the situation, they should first exit the mine and report back to him.

However, Sylvie couldn't accept this as correct. There existed no monster which could escape the investigation of her magic eye, even those animal corpses, and the twisting soft-bodied snakes within the walls were clearly visible to her.

There were four people in the expedition team, herself, Nightingale, Lightning, together with a little girl called Lucia. Every time they found some minerals, she would convert them into a variety of debris, and after carefully classifying them she would put them into her pocket, which would later be handed over to His Royal Highness.

Lightning was responsible for drawing the map of the mine, since in her own words, there didn't exist any adventure from which she could be excluded. Hearing her prideful speech, Sylvie couldn't help but think of the captain who was temporarily staying on Sleeping Island.

The 23rd cave was at the lower level of the mining site and could actually be regarded as an enormously deep hole. After penetrating several hundred steps into the mountain, it divided into three

paths again, and after following each to their end, they would once again split into several branches. However, since they were at the exterior area of the mining site, with only the rare possibility of find any veins, they had decided to end their exploration.

Returning to the first fork, which Lightning had recorded as “Gate of Life”, Sylvie cast her ability to observe the 23rd cave and the circumstances of those three pathways.

The further she spread the range of her Eye of Truth, the greater the magic consumption was, and the heavier the burden on her body. So she decided to observe one channel after another at each fork.

“Cave number three... yes, there aren’t any mining areas at the end of it. There are... ” she spent a moment frozen in shock, “There are five branches, including one that seems to lead further downwards while also making a detour.”

“Downwards?” Lightning repeated.

“It is indeed like that,” Sylvie confirmed while taking another look. It didn’t take long until the slender downwards leading path turned around a corner and pointed straight back at the mine. When she tried to further explore along the road, her mind suddenly became flooded with a strong sense of dizziness which interrupted her contact with her magic eye, “I think it may lead to a mineral deposit.”

But this interpretation was a bit far-fetched, the North Slope

Mine's tangled and complicated cave system was clearly not something which had been artificially dug out. Furthermore, if she hadn't been specifically looking for ore, it would be unlikely she'd have discovered any unknown veins, even if they were hidden between two channels. If not for her Eye of Truth which was able to penetrate any obstacle, it would be simply impossible to find any minerals hidden behind rocks and under piles of mud.

"No matter what, let's immediately go and take a look," Nightingale said, and shrugged her shoulders.

The group entered the cave behind the third gate one after another, and about a quarter of an hour later they had already arrived at the end of the passage.

There the tunnel divided itself into five like she had seen it. One among them was even so narrow that it was impossible for people to walk through and so it could only be entered by crawling. However, the strange channel Sylvie had seen before was located in the middle of the five, and its topography changed dramatically, almost forming a deep slope when compared with the place they were standing now.

"It seems as if it is going straight down," Nightingale said and held up the torch, "I feel as if this grotto is somewhat similar to the deep cliff of the Impassable Mountain Range."

"Let's quickly finish the inspection, then immediately turn back," Lucia said in fright as she instinctively grasped on to Nightingale's arm. "I do not like it here... I constantly feel as if something is staring at us from within the cave."

“There is nothing in the cave, except for mud and stone,” Sylvie said, even though she didn’t like this quiet and moist place, her ability still told her that there was no danger. “The four on the left and right all contain no ore and are leading further away from the mining site.” She quickly finished the inspection of the leveled side roads, then moved her line of sight towards the front, only to immediately lose focus and release a faint, “...ah?”

“What’s going on?” Lightning asked.

“I... am unable to see the circumstances further down.”

“You cannot see it?” The little girl asked in disbelief, “Can it be that you are too tired and so your ability just don’t work?”

“No, my ability doesn’t have any problems,” Sylvie said and closed her eye, before opening it again, only to see that everything still remained dark, the same as if she had completely lost her vision. Enduring the on-coming headache, she tried to expand her field of vision further, but the results still remained the same, while the surrounding soil became clearly discernible. Only the pass in the middle was enveloped in complete darkness which was as thick as ink. “There seems to be something which obstructs my peeking.”

“You will all wait over here and don’t leave,” Nightingale ordered while simultaneously drawing her two shining silver weapons, “I will go in to explore the situation and immediately come back afterward.”

“Do not go!” Sylvie shouted, grasping her forehead in pain, “There exist only one thing that can produce such an effect. Even if you go, you will be in danger.”

“What is it?”

“God’s Stone of Retaliation,” Sylvie said through clenched teeth, “There is a God’s Stone of Retaliation underground, and it is covering that whole region!”

...

When Roland heard the news, he immediately mobilized soldiers of the First Army and led them into the North Slope Mine.

And the result of their inspection confirmed Sylvie’s guess; they discovered a large amount of God’s Stone of Retaliation at the bottom of the deep hole.

After determining that there was no danger, Roland also entered cave No. 23 with the protection of his personal guards. He wished to see for himself how the God’s Stone of Retaliation at the bottom of the mine looked like.

“Your Highness, please be careful,” Carter reminded him once more, “The exit is directly in front of us.”

“You are unable to use your magic here,” Roland said while looking back at Anna, Nightingale, and Lightning standing behind him, “Didn’t you learn it from Sylvie?”

“Even without magic, I will still be stronger than you. If you can go, I, of course, can also go,” Nightingale said disapprovingly.

“Wherever there is an adventure; I will also be there.” Lightning announced while puffing out her chest.

Anna however didn’t say anything, she merely stared straight into Roland’s eyes. Seeing the flickering flame from the torches in her clear eyes, Roland knew that regardless what he said it would prove to be useless.

“All right,” he sighed. “But you must stay by my side and don’t move too far.”

Coming to the end of the slope, Roland immediately understood the meaning of the Chief Knight’s words.

Suddenly his eyes became filled with light, and a vast and deep cavern then appeared in front of him.

Even without the aid of torches, he could still clearly see the whole cave since it was illuminated by the crystal prism like God’s Stone of Retaliation. He could see some majestic towers rising straight from the ground, with a diameter of twenty to thirty meters at the base which seemed similar to some very large neon

towers.

Chapter 273 - God's Stone Of Retaliation

Roland roughly estimated the size of the underground cave, the area below was almost the size of a football field, and was surrounded by steep mountain walls. The road connecting it with the other cave started in the middle of one of those mountain walls, and next to the tunnel entrance he could see a narrow stone staircase, which extended straight towards the bottom.

“I guess this staircase wasn’t cut out by you,” Roland said while he squatted down and brought his torch near the ground. In the torchlight, he could clearly see marks carved out by knives and axes, with piles of dust and rock bits that were within the notches.

“Of course not, Your Highness. At the time we discovered the cave, the stone steps had already existed.” Carter said and shrugged his shoulders, “I guess they must have already been here for decades.”

“Or since hundreds of years,” Anna suddenly spoke.

“I think so too,” Lightning nodded in agreement, “It is only seventy years since Border Town has been established, it is unlikely for the stone staircase to be related to the locals here or even the kingdom.”

“There were already some people living in the Western Territory several hundred of years ago?” Carter questioned, “Graycastle hadn’t even existed back then.”

Roland patted the knight's shoulder, "Four hundred and fifty years ago, there existed a group of people who have already been forgotten by history." Then he lifted the torch and said, "Let's go down and take a look."

Twenty to thirty soldiers of the First Army were already standing at the center of the cave, so he took the knight and the witches then went next to one of the God's Punishment Stones without delay. Only when he stood at the edge of this stone pillar was he finally able to realize how huge this actually was. Even by extending his arms as far as he could, he still wasn't able to surround even a tenth of it.

He lifted his head and looked at the top, the tallest pillar made out of God's Stone of Retaliation already came close to thirty meters, which was almost equivalent to the height of an eight or nine story building, and was shining in an ominous purple light.

In theory, stones could emit light either by having a radioactive material, or by containing some fluorescent components. But, the rays of light emitted by the God's Stone of Retaliation obviously had nothing to do with any of these possibilities. The light from the former was from the ionization in the air as the elements decayed. Furthermore, the shorter the half-life, the greater the brightness would be. But according to these very words and taking the stones' brightness into account, the soldiers who had already entered the cave for several minutes, would have died from ionization radiation by now. While the latter possibility would need an external light to shine on it, but there was no light source here at the bottom of the mine, which could support it enough to send out the light continuously.

Roland also noted that although the God's Stone of Retaliation had a crystal's commonly seen prism shape, its surface didn't have the veined pattern that came from crystals, but was instead as smooth as glass.

"The Church sells a thumb sized piece of a God's Stone of Retaliation for several gold royals. However, a piece of this magnitude... it is something impossible to acquire even after emptying the vaults of the entire Four Kingdoms." Carter couldn't stop himself from lamenting.

"You want to give it to the nobles to slaughter witches?" Nightingale asked with a fierce glare.

"Uh, this isn't what I meant," The Chief Knight answered quickly, while unconsciously moving out from her line of sight.

"It is the first time that I have seen God's Stone of Retaliation shine in these colors, shouldn't they be transparent white—" Lightning curiously looked at the pillars, "In case you take them back with you, won't it be unnecessary to use a candle in the evening?"

"I'd rather bring a candle into an already stuffy room filled with dozens of candles, than use this for light," Nightingale murmured while placing both her hands on her chest, "For us witches, they are a prison cage, the stocks and chains that are held by the Church! If the world didn't have these damnable stones, it would be better off."

“Oh, Sister Nightingale, you couldn’t read a sentence in the evening anyway...” The little girl licked her lips, picked up a stone from the ground and looked at Roland. “Can I take a piece of it back with me as my spoils of adventure?”

Roland nodded, “If you don’t hate these kind of things.”

She held a stone and raised her arm into the air and swung it towards the stone pillar. It smashed against the edge of the prism, only to hear a “ting” as the stone in her hand splintered while the prism showed not even the slightest scar.

Seeing this, Carter shouted in shock, “What’s going on?... Shouldn’t the God’s Stone of Retaliation be fragile?”

“Perhaps it is because this chunk is shining differently,” Lightning threw the remaining stone chips in her hand away and took a dagger out of her waist purse. However, even after a good deal of tossing around the prism, with all kinds of scraping and cutting, it was still to no avail.

Feeling that something was wrong, Roland looked at Nightingale and said, “You try it.”

The latter merely nodded, took out her revolver, aimed directly at the prism then pulled the trigger. Immediately followed by an enormous echo splitting the silence in the cave, and the birth of some sparks at the impact area of the God’s Stone of Retaliation. After the smoke cleared, the group walked over to the stone, merely to discover that the bullet wasn’t even able to do anything

more than leaving a small stain on the God's Stone of Retaliation's surface.

This suggested that the durability of these intensely shining stones already exceed that of homogenized steel plates.

“Even the gun is useless?” Carter asked with a frown, “In the end, how is the Church able to cut a piece off and sell it?”

No one could answer this question, causing everyone's expression to cloud up.

Even Roland had been able to use his own force to break the God's Stone of Retaliation, like that time he'd broken the necklace around Anna's neck for instances. Just two or three pulls from him had been enough to turn the pure and limpid stone into a pile of white dust.

But at this moment, Anna who had been silent until now, suddenly opened her mouth, “Your Highness, do you still remember the ‘treasure map’ that Ferlin Eltek had drawn?”

“Treasure map?” Roland asked confused. He could vaguely remember that there was a triangle occupying more than half of the drawing. One of the three edges pointed at the Holy City Taqila, one at the stone tower in the Concealing Forest and one at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain... hold on, at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain? Suddenly a lightning spark flashed through his brain, “Don't tell me...”

“I don’t think it was pointing at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain, rather it was pointing here,” Anna said slowly, “This is a place which contained a lot of God’s Stone of Retaliation underground.”

Even after a careful search, besides a large number of indestructible God’s Stone of Retaliation, they hadn’t been able to discover anything else that was of value within the cave.

Not to mention remains of ancient books, there weren’t even chiseling tools used for the stone staircase left behind, which was very strange. According to the current level of technology, if they wanted to chisel out a staircase in such a steep cliff, it absolutely would be a tremendous and arduous undertaking. Things such as accidentally falling or losing tools should have been frequent occurrences. But for the current scene, besides the stones, and even more stones, it seemed as if the cave had been thoroughly cleaned before they’d left.

When Roland returned to his office, he immediately called for Scroll, and had her reproduce the Knight’s drawing on top of her ‘Book of Changes’.

Similar to the pattern in his memory, the southernmost point was indeed located at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain.

If Anna’s guess is right, can it be a map left behind by the Church, contains new veins of God’s Punishment Stones? However, why would they spend all that time and effort to dig out

the stairway to the bottom only to abandon it afterward? If the Church had already built a church in Border Town four hundred and fifty years ago, I am afraid that the current Border Town would look completely different from now. In accordance with the God's Stone of Retaliation selling price and its usage, it is unlikely that they would willingly give up the natural resources in this mine.

Nowadays the Holy City of Taqila had already become a forbidden region, that was fully out of reach. Perhaps the only remaining possibility for finding the answer lies hidden within the stone tower... or perhaps it will remain unknown forever.

Chapter 274 - Exam

After dinner, Candle entered the castle hall quite early.

On every nightfall, Teacher Scroll would give lessons in the room, but unlike the aristocracy colleges in large cities, the students who attended the lecture were witches from the Witch Union.

But she wasn't the first person to come to the "classroom", when she entered Evelyn was already sitting at the long table and waving to her.

"Has His Highness assigned any duty to you recently?" The moment Candle took her place, Evelyn couldn't stop herself from asking.

She recalled the time they had only just arrived, and she had dryly addressed the other party as 'milord'. While secretly laughing at the bottom of her heart Candle answered, "There is, he gave me the task to cast my ability on a few strange lumps of metal, so that they would remain at room temperature, but I don't understand what use that would have."

"Yes... It's like that," Evelyn's eyes became dull, "So far, His Highness had not asked me to do anything."

"He didn't provide you with adjusted practice content?" Candle asked in wonder.

“No, I’m practicing according to my own wishes,” Evelyn shook her head and said. “He only occasionally comes and asks me to taste a new wine.”

“Maybe that is just that what His Highness is looking for, all your life you’ve been in pubs, and so you’re very familiar with the taste of the drinks. There aren’t many witches like you.”

“There is no need for a witch who can taste wine at all,” she protested. “A salary of a gold royal is enough to recruit a specialized winemaker.”

“Uh...” Candle patted the other side’s shoulder, “I think His Royal Highness certainly must have a plan.”

“Scroll also tried to comfort me this way, but even I do not know what to do with my ability. I cannot simply rely on air to turn water into wine... Don’t tell me he just wants to make the tastiest type of wine to sell? But commoners are only able to afford ale of poor quality, while all the nobles have their personal preference which doesn’t have anything in common with one another.” Evelyn laid her chin on the table and continued in a depressed tone, “And the wine His Royal Highness gives me to taste is becoming more and more... hard to drink. I already suggested that he adds water or fruit juice, but he seems to only want to make the strongest wine possible.”

For a moment, Candle didn’t know what to say, regarding this point, she and Evelyn were both sitting in the same boat. After

reaching Sleeping Island, most of the time they could only do some trifling chores – along with the daily increase in fish oil, solidifying candles had become unnecessary, while Tilly completely forbid any sort of drinking in general.

Even during the early tense phases, their supplies were often allocated according to a person's ability; sometimes Candle would only receive some unsalted grilled fish. During this she never had the feeling that there was any problem with this approach, to the contrary, she was even willing to forgo her food for those witches who needed to consume larger amounts of their magic. However, that the other witches began to divide themselves into groups and even somewhat excluded her had made her feel a little uncomfortable.

Fortunately, Lady Tilly had still looked after them extremely well, even apologizing for the method of distribution, and going so far as promising that after the supplies became more plentiful, they would start to make adjustments, this way the less-favored witches didn't feel the rejection that clearly anymore.

But in Border Town such a situation had never occurred – all the witches sat together at the same table, and enjoyed the meal together with His Royal Highness. And the clothes they put on and the treatment shown to them didn't hold any differences... but the most important difference she'd been able to see during their daily life, was that regardless whether their ability was formidable or not, they all regarded each other as a one group. Although it had only been two short weeks since she'd come to Border Town, she had already experienced this point very deeply.

They really considered each other as sisters.

Something which made Candle feel very envious.

When all the witches had come and sat down, Teacher Scroll entered the room while carrying a stack of white papers, “Today, I won’t teach you any new content. Instead, I will conduct a comprehensive exam of what you have learned until now.”

“What is that?” Lightning asked as she raised her hand.

“Googoo?” Maggie also asked.

“You have been studying for three months now, and His Highness believes that it is time to test the results of your learning.” Scroll said cheerfully, “All the questions have been arranged on these papers and are separated into three parts, kingdom language, mathematics, and nature. Altogether there are sixty questions, every answer gives a point while every mistake lowers the score... Of course, if you do not understand the problem, you just have to raise your hand and ask your question. I believe that all of you have already mastered the primary writing and reading skill, or else even if you’d known the answer, you would still be unable to answer.” Scroll paused for a moment before continuing, “By the way, His Highness had said that only those who have answered more than half of the question correctly, will be able to enjoy ice cream during the weekend’s afternoon tea. If your score is below this limit, you will lose your afternoon tea qualification.”

Candle suddenly heard a gasping sound, she turned around and saw Nightingale wearing a dumbstruck expression with charcoal lying in two pieces on the ground.

“Furthermore, His Highness has especially made it clear, that the five witches that came from Sleeping Island are not to be included in this arrangement. So it is their decision whether they want to stay behind and answer or if they want to leave and have a free evening.” Scroll looked one after another at Candle, Evelyn, and the others, before saying “No matter what your final score is, you will be able to enjoy the delicious afternoon tea.”

“Puh,” Evelyn patted her chest, turned her head and whispered, “I won’t be able to recognize all the letters, so I’m not confident that I will get the ice cream.”

Honey and Lotus immediately got up, happily saluted Scroll and left the hall afterward.

Plus, Sylvie, whose body had been feeling somewhat unwell and thus hadn’t even come to the hall, left Evelyn and Candle as the only witches from Sleeping Island in the hall.

“Do you want to stay?” Candle asked in a small voice.

“I want to try,” the other nodded, “Didn’t His Highness say that knowledge leads to evolution? If I don’t work hard in this respect, I’m afraid I will never be able to compare with them.” She showed a sly smile, “These days I’ve been practicing writing my characters in my room after the class, Lily and Mystery Moon also taught me

how to read and write some common words.”

While mentioning this, the frustration within Evelyn’s voice immediately dispersed a lot, and her eyes became shiny, making it impossible for Candle not to smile.

“Yes, I’ll also try it.”

...

“Your Royal Highness, the test results have come out,” Scroll said while handing the summary over to Roland.

“You’ve worked hard,” Since the recent discovery beneath the Northern Slope mine Roland was still feeling quite puzzled. So he found it difficult to concentrate on his daily tasks, so he tried to focus on something less intense, “Huh? Was Nightingale’s performance unexpectedly able to meet the standard required?”

“Yes, but not only was it good enough, her grade was even in the forefront; which was partly due to her perfect language score,” Scroll reported with a smile, “After all, most of your topics were very simple. Furthermore, she has already learned how to read and write a long time ago, so her starting point had been much better compared to the other witches.”

“Tsk,” Roland smacked his lips, “I thought I could make her eat fewer sweets with this exam.” Even before his voice had completely fallen, he felt his shoulder being severely pinched. “In

short, the result look quite good, all the members of the Witch Union have more than sixty, so it seems that your education is bearing fruit.”

“These results are also inseparable from their efforts.”

Moving his vision further down Roland asked, “Only two of the witches of Sleeping Island participated in the test?”

“Well, the one named Evelyn received five points, while Candle got thirty-six. The latter should already have some prior foundations, so most of her points come from kingdom language.” She replied.

That she, even after having followed the class for only two weeks, was still able to receive some points outside of the writing part right, shows that her individual quality is truly astonishing. Both instincts and external knowledge are components to the continual improvement of a witch’s magic.

The results of their own witches were also excellent, for example, Lily, Hummingbird, Mystery Moon and the others had only spent three months’ time from being illiterate before they grasped the basics of reading and writing, and with this they’ve already exceeded the majority of the people in the streets.

What would the future look like when the people could put aside their prejudices and work together with the witches to promote the level of society and civilization as a whole? Roland’s heart became filled with anticipation at the thought.

Chapter 275 - Lucia And Nightingale

Lucia was cautious and solemn as she put three iron chunks on the floor of her bedroom before closing her eyes. She took a deep breath, and went through the experiences from her previous practice once more, then stretched out her hand and release her ability to surround the target.

This was the method of practicing that Anna had helped her come up with. Using three wrought iron ingots which had been especially melted by Anna that were made out of components that had nothing in common with each other, and all respectively containing silver, copper, lead, and some other impurities. Her task was to reconstruct them as pure substances while at the same time leaving behind the impurities and to also find the ingot that contained the highest amount of silver.

This meant that she had to control her magic output, and always needed to work on one target first.

Otherwise, it could happen that she broke the impurities further into their elements, which was what she had previously done at her home in Valencia, and was also the reason why she felt that her ability were so hard to control. Even if two pieces of paper looked the same, if they were restored to their original elements they could look very different. The fact that there was a relation between the amount of magic power she used and the effect of her abilities, was something she would never be able to comprehend by herself. Which led to the result that the components of some of the papers had been split apart several times, and ultimately turned most of the raw materials into water and gas.

After arriving in Border Town, the first lesson the other witches taught her, was that she had to practice controlling her magic.

Originally Lucia wasn't convinced that those invisible and incomprehensible things could also be precisely be controlled. Only when Anna demonstrated how she was able to control the lengths of her black flame, was she finally able to discover how badly mistaken she had been. Not only could Anna adjust the output of her magic, and change the size and thickness of the black flame, she was able to reach a level of perfection in it each and every time.

"Elder sister, are you going to go practice again?" Bell curiously stuck her head out of the bed. "It's just after lunch."

Lucia's hand trembled, and the iron ingot in her hand immediately turned into a pile of fine dust.

"I told you not to bother me when I'm using my power," she said, turning around to knock against the top of her sister's head, "Concentrate on reading your letters!"

"I'm unable to make sense of what I'm looking at," Bell said fretful, "I can't even understand half of the words' meaning; I'm not like older sister, you can write and read."

"That's why it is important to read more; many words have a similar structure, so even if you haven't seen them before, you should still be able to guess what it means. Literacy is a

familiarizing process.”

“Alright,” Bell retracted her head.

Lucia focused her attention on the second piece of iron ingot, then exercised her control to slowly release her magic. She tried to imagine a thin layer of gauze covering the ingot, and wrapping it up evenly.

“Hey, I came,” the door suddenly squeaked, and the blonde woman dashed into the room. “Hey, are you practicing your ability?”

“Sister Nightingale!” Bell shouted carefreely.

The second piece of iron once again turned into a pile of fine powder.

Lucia sighed and put all the metal debris on the floor into a leather bag, feeling that it might be impossible to train today.

“Here, this is yours.”

Suddenly an ice cream with a rich aroma of milk was handed over to her.

“Thank you,” Lucia said, taking the ice cream, “But shouldn’t this only have been given out during the afternoon tea?”

Nightingale proudly patted her chest and said, “Oh, that’s true. But this is a special reward I requested from His Highness... here, you also get one.” With these words, she handed another one to Bell, which made the little girl immediately burst into laughter.

“Sister Nightingale is the best!”

This gal, as soon as she sees something delicious everything else gets thrown to the back of her mind, Lucia thought helplessly. But the moment the ice cream entered her mouth, and the sweet and rich taste of honey and milk spread through her mouth, together with the cold and refreshing feeling of the ice, further enhancing its sweetness; she also felt that if she had been in her sister’s place she would most likely also have reacted in the same way. Even after completely swallowing it, it still left a slight chill on her teeth and her lips.

No one can resist its deliciousness, especially during the hot summer. No wonder that His Highness only gives out ice cream during the weekend afternoon tea. She was afraid that this unique style of food was actually worth a lot of money, she at least had never heard of this dessert during her life in Valencia.

Thinking until here, Lucia could not help but ask, “How were you able to get it from His Highness?”

“Heh heh,” Nightingale smiled widely, “I ranked third during the exam, second only to Wendy and Leaves, however, His Highness thought I would be unable to pass the exam at all. Since the actual

situation was worlds apart from his imagination, it was only natural that I requested a special reward from him.”

“Actually... it was like this,” she hesitated for a moment then asked, “Then, my?”

“Sixty-eight, but I don’t know your actual rank.”

“Uh, so low.” Lucia was depressed. Altogether there were 120 points, but I was only able to get a little bit more than half of them right, even though I already learned how to read and write long ago.

“That’s pretty good,” Nightingale said while patting her head. “After all, how long have you been following the lectures? It’s only natural that you would fall a bit short in regards to mathematics and nature. But if you ever come across any problem, you can come and ask me if you want.”

“Me? Can I also ask!?” Bell raised her hand.

“Of course,” Nightingale answered laughingly, “You’re welcome at any time.”

“If I pass the elementary examination, is it possible for me to choose my own work?”

“You are still too young, His Highness said, the minimum age to start to work is fourteen years of age, but right now you are only

ten years old, so don't be so anxious." Lucia stared at her.

However, the little girl was unwilling to give up so easily, "I also want to help you share the pressure. In case you want to get married and have a baby, you will need to spend a lot of money. If the money is not enough, your days will become very painful!"

"Where did you hear this?" Lucia threw her hands in front of her face.

"Daddy said it; he was always nagging that he'd almost been unable to raise us."

"Pfff, hahaha," Nightingale couldn't suppress her laughter, "If you could take a job, where would you go?"

"Chemical laboratory!" Bell raised her hand and said, "I want to become an alchemist, get the title of Sage and receive everyone's admiration and praise!"

"This... better not," she shook her head. "The lab is dangerous."

"Dangerous?" The sisters asked simultaneous.

"Yeah," Nightingale said while spreading out her hands, "Not only do they often have to deal with acids, but there are also explosions sometimes. Even the chief alchemist Kyle Sichi was unable to avoid accidents. Four of his fingers were blown away last time. I'm afraid that if it weren't for Nana's magic, Mr. Sichi

would've been unable to pick up any jars or bottles for the rest of his life." She paused, "Furthermore, it seems that His Highness is recently trying to develop a new type of gunpowder. And even he thinks that it is extremely dangerous, so he commanded that it could only be done in a separate laboratory."

"Uh, in that case, do you have any good suggestions?" Lucia went over and wrapped Bell into her arms, determined never to let her sister go to such a dangerous place.

"Without a doubt, she should enter the City Hall and become a civil servant."

"Civil... servant?" she repeated.

Nightingale coughed twice, "Cough cough, that was what His Highness called them when he was thinking out loud. Commonly speaking, they are called City Hall Officials. Their job is stable and safe, while their salary is on the upper level. Moreover, their prospects are also good, if you can become a department head, your rewards won't be less than that of a witch."

"So, it's like this," Lucia said thoughtfully.

"Sister Nightingale, do you like His Royal Highness?" Bell asked in curiosity, "In many of your sentences you say: 'His Highness said', my mother said, you'd only talk so much about someone if you liked them."

When she heard her sister's question, Lucia's face became stiff. To hell with it! How can you directly ask such a question, this is simply too rude. At most we can be regarded as friends, so you cannot ask such a question of someone; even more so since that person is my highly-esteemed senior. She felt stricken by panic and hurriedly covered Bell's mouth, but before she could even start her apologies, Nightingale already gave her a frank response.

“Yeah, I like him.”

Chapter 276 - New Artillery Research And Development

While on her way to bring the ore to His Highness, Nightingale's answer was running through Lucia's mind.

She had to admit, she was shocked by the calm manner in which Nightingale had revealed her feelings.

Although she wasn't entirely clear about the feelings of all the people involved, but a witch and a prince... simply couldn't ever be with each other, right? So shouldn't she be careful and hide her thoughts at the bottom of her heart, and never let others know about them?

Furthermore, why would she as a simple listener feel so excited and embarrassed?

Coming to a stop in front of the door to the office, Lucia took a deep breath before pushing open the door and entering.

"Your Highness, I've brought the ore."

"Let me see," Roland answered as he fought the urge to yawn.

The ruler of Border Town seemed the same as always, with his drowsy-eyed appearance it seemed it hasn't been that long since he'd finished taking his nap and it wasn't like he was in that much

of a clear-headed state yet either. While leaning comfortably against the back of his chair, showing a natural bearing and speaking with an easy-going tone, he was completely unlike the other nobles with their strict and insulting mannerism.

Seeing him like this, Lucia's former indescribable nervousness loosened by a small amount. She then calmly took out the ore granules they'd found in the Northern Slope Mine and place them on the desk one after another.

After being broken down with her ability, all those granules now seemed to have almost the same look. Their colors weren't ash-colored, but were silver-white instead, and it was probably only a brilliant person of wide learning like the Prince that would be able to distinguish what these ores really were.

However, even after looking at them for a long time, the Prince still ended up knitting his brow. First, he took them into his hand one after another in order to estimate their weight. He then went to the window behind his desk to take a closer look from within the sunlight, only to finally wave with his hand and say, "Keke, seems I have no choice but to give these ores to Mr. Sichi to identify them. For now, you can go back to the courtyard at the North Slope and continue the practice of your ability, if there is something you don't understand you can always go to Anna and ask."

"..." Huh? There exist something His Highness doesn't know? Lucia quickly bowed and said, "Yes."

Just as she was about to leave the office, Roland called out to her

again.

“Oh, that’s right, your present test grade is pretty good, sixty-eight ranking ninth in the class. And that’s after just one month of learning. Showing such a performance is not easy, so you must try and keep it up. Also...,” he paused for a moment. “I hope that Bell can also participate in the next exam together with everyone.”

“Yes!” Lucia excitedly agreed.

After watching the little girl happily bow away, Roland looked at the metal particles on the table and sighed.

I was too naive, thinking that by breaking them down into one element, I might be able to discover what kinds of ore veins are hidden within the Northern Slope Mine. However, I once again have to acknowledge that there is a great deal of difference between mechanical engineering and geology. If that wasn’t the case, I would have known that these stones would be broken down into three or four different kinds of metals. The most of the still remaining parts of the rocks can be considered as metalloid ores, but they have almost no difference in their color or shape. Such as iron, aluminum, magnesium, potassium when in a high purity state they are all silver-white metals, if I ever wanted to distinguish them by naked eye it will be much too difficult.

In the end, it is still better to give this issue to the chief alchemist to resolve, after all, he can verify the characteristics of the material through observing their chemical reaction, which should be much

more reliable than my own guesses.

When he made up his mind regarding this matter, Roland took out a piece of paper and began planning on how to deal with the upcoming Months of Demons.

Seeing that summer was about to end, these three months of fall were his final preparation time. Besides resisting the invasion of the demonic beasts from the West, he had also had to keep an eye on Timothy and the Church who might come from the Eastern side. Unlike last year where he had to pull on his lapels exposing the elbows, Border Town's population and income nowadays had gone through a substantial growth. They had also gradually increased the iron production, and with the help of more than a dozen witches, he was sure that he would be able to turn the Western Territory into an impassable iron bastion.

Based on to the previous year's combat experience, the greatest threat to the wall was without a doubt the mixed demonic beasts. Especially so when the enemy had a thick crust, which would be hard to wear down using bullets, and thus could only be killed by explosion at a close proximity, or by sending witches out of the city. However, no matter what kind of countermeasure he used, they both held high risks.

Also, until now he had only faced attacks from the enemy's cavalry or infantry, so he had never seen this era's siege weaponry. If the other side could construct a torsion catapult, or the more advanced counterweight trebuchets, he feared that he would encounter a lot of trouble. After all, the process of loading a cannon so that it could fire was very inconvenient. Not only did

they have to raise the cannon chamber each time they loaded , it was also easy for the cannon ball to roll out of it.

These circumstances all meant it was inevitable that he would have to develop a new cannon.

After thoughtfully thinking about it, Roland began to list all of the requirements he had onto a piece of paper.

First of all, it had to have a sufficient shooting distance and force; enough that it could break through the shell of a mixed species that was a thousand meters away. Secondly, it had to be rear loaded, this way the head could freely be lowered or raised, while still preserving its ability to shoot quickly. Finally, in order to reduce the time of repeated research and development, the cannon should also be designed to fulfill several purposes. Meaning that in addition to being used to defend a stronghold and suppress the enemy, it could also be directly pulled onto a ship and be employed as the major weapon for future heavy gunboats.

Because of this it would have to be a large caliber with a long barrel type of heavy artillery.

Roland first thought of those 15-16 cun (2.5cm) huge monsters that were used on battleships, with a range of several scores of kilometers, and powerful enough for a shot to dig several meters deep into the ground, only to quickly reject an unrealistic idea such as this. Although there shouldn't be any problem on the processing side, but with Border Town's current level of materials, it meant that at least nine out of ten cannons would be explode. And if he thickened the cannon's wall to more than one meter, they would

lose their practical value since he would be no longer able to move them.

By now he could only give birth to high-purity wrought iron that had the performance of ordinary steel. So the plan still had to be on the conservative side.

Roland finally set the caliber to the sacred number of 152 millimeters.

The cannon used a vertical wedge breechblock, which was upwards and downwards sliding door..When it was pulled down it exposed the cannon's chamber, and after loading it with an artillery shell, the block could be moved back up to completely lock the rear, so that the gunpowder could only erupt forward. Compared to a spiral breechblock and horizontal wedge breechblock, its speed was faster, and its principle was also very simple and was a blueprint he already knew by heart.

However, if he wanted to implement rapid firing, the artillery had to be equipped with a recoil mechanism, which in simple terms resembled two bicycle pumps, one that was filled with a padding of oil and the other with a spring or gas. Due to the recoil the muzzle would press against the two tubes, and would simultaneously compress the oil and the spring. The oil was used to buffer the recoil, while the spring would store the power and push the canon back into its original position after the shell left.

Lastly the shell.

Since he was already using the sacred cannon, there was no way he could be satisfied with using clumsy iron balls and paper wrapped canister shot anymore. But Roland decided to develop two sets of artillery shells just to be safe, one would be the enlarged version of a bullet, with a warhead made out of solid metal; and another kind, one that had an explosive warhead and using an impact detonator, like the howitzers used by later generations. After all, he would surely come across some technological problems while developing the explosive warheads, things like the development of a reliable detonator needed repeated testing. Because of this he couldn't guarantee that he could achieve it before the begin of the Months of Demons, therefore they had to first produce the former before they could resolve the problems of the latter. Even with a solid warhead, it should still be possible to easily deal with the slow-moving thick-skinned mixed beasts and fixed siege equipment.

Of course, no matter which kind of shells he used in the end, both would still consume a lot of smokeless gunpowder. In case they weren't able to start large-scale production of the two acids, the new guns could only be used as special weapons, which would mean that wanting to employ a large artillery barrage would be impossible to realize despite how much he wanted to do so.

At this moment, one of his personal guards pushed open the door and entered the office.

“Your Highness, a secret letter from King's City has arrived.”

Roland put down the quill and opened the envelope. From start to finish, the letter didn't have a signature, and its handwriting

was also very unfamiliar, but its short sentence made it clear that Theo was undoubtedly the one who had sent it.

“Today a group of about a thousand people left King’s City, while heading toward the Western Border.”

Chapter 277 - Theater Conflict

Longsong Stronghold, theater performance hall.

The curtain fell to the sound of the audience's endless whistles and cheers. May wiped the sweat from her forehead and saw Irene's gaze, full of excitement and expectation, lingering on herself; she gave two slight nods in response.

This acknowledgment made Irene cheer out loud, the moment the curtain hit the ground, she could no longer stop herself from rushing over, and forcefully wrapped May into a hug.

“Hahaha, I really can play it!”

So troublesome, May gave her a supercilious look and pushed her away, “At last you have made some progress and can now take the stage independently.”

“Miss may, then... what's with me?” Rosia, another actor that was playing a witch cautiously asked her.

“You still have a long way to go,” she answered without hesitation, “Your expression is still stiff, your movements are sluggish, you also didn't put any feelings into your lines. During the second act you made two mistakes, and during the fourth act you'd positioned yourself incorrectly, which is a typical mistake if you don't memorize the script.”

“Haha, Miss May is indeed really strict,” Gheit awkwardly scratched the back of his head, “However, the audience’s response seems to be very good, if you listen, you can hear that the applause has yet to subside.”

“Most of these people are civilians who have never been to the theater, so seeing a play such as this is still a new thing for them,” May interjected bluntly. “If this had been a regular show, those several mistakes would have been sufficient for the nobility to all let out hissing sounds.” She paused, “If you want to go down the actor’s road, you are never allowed to be satisfied with temporary successes, only by continually improving yourself will you be able to gain a firm foothold on the stage.”

The surrounding people all simultaneously lowered their heads and said, “Yes, thank you for your guidance!”

May sighed, here we go again, I definitely cannot be considered as the drama tutor of this group of people. But in the end, she was too lazy to care about such a trivial matter and merely said, “All right, everyone carry on with your hard work. The ‘Witch Diary’ will be shown at least until September, so there are still many plays during which we can develop further. This is a rare opportunity; no one should miss out on it.”

“Yes!”

One month ago May had received a notice from the Ministry of Education, the members of the theater team were instructed to go to Longsong Stronghold and perform. These so-called members were those inferior performers she had met at the start of her

journey to Border Town, and Irene Eltek.

Perhaps it was because His Highness the Prince and acting Duke Petrov had reached an agreement with the theater to let them free its schedule, so that the crew could perform the “Witch Diary” trilogy. And so, with this group of amateur performers, together with the newly added actors who also couldn’t be considered as well-known actors, were now openly performing on the stronghold theater’s biggest stage. At normal times, they might not even be selected as a substitute for a supporting role. Now however, not only were they able to play the role of an important character on stage, but they could also perform hand in hand with the Star of the West, which made a lot of people lament about the impermanence of destiny.

When May returned to the backstage area, she couldn’t refrain from puckering her brows.

There at the lounge, she saw a group of people disturbing everyone with their noise, seemingly trying to start a dispute. The moment they saw May appear, more than a dozen followed the leadership of one woman as they stepped forward and began to surround her.

These people were all actors of the theater. May also recognized the woman leading them, she was called Bella Dean and was a famous actor that belonged to a different group. Some nobles even went so far as to say that she was May’s biggest competitor for the position as the Star of the West, but in fact, whether it was her acting or fame, she had never been able to pressure May.

“Guess who I’m finally able to see?” Bella bypassed May and slowly started to walk over towards Irene one step at a time, “A group of inferior actors who’ve sneakily returned from the countryside.”

“What did you say?” Irene asked with a bewildered face, Gheit, Rosia, and the other’s faces all turned stiff and they couldn’t stop themselves from taking two steps back.

“Pfff,” Bella covered her mouth and said, “She doesn’t even know her own identity and status.” These words aroused a burst of laughter from the group, “Then let me say it directly to you, a big city such as Longsong Stronghold isn’t a place where people like you should come to perform. Moreover, the stronghold theater also doesn’t welcome such a vulgar and third-rate performance. What ‘witch diary’? it’s just a few stray dogs all howling in grief. Who could ever be interested in seeing this kind of drama that’s bad enough to spoil one’s appetite? The earlier you get lost and return to Border Town, the better.”

“You,” Irene suddenly turned red, “What do you call a third-rate performance? didn’t you hear the applause of the audience?”

“Ha, audience?” Bella sneered sarcastically, “You call those people who work in the mud, and come in contact with hoes and furnaces every day, an audience? Don’t make me lose a tooth from laughing! Just catch some monkeys and make them run in circles and they will also be cheering loudly! If it hadn’t been for the free tickets, would they ever have the spare money to come and see you perform?”

“I...” Irene opened her mouth but didn’t know how to properly refute.

“The theater already has to deal with a continuous fall in revenue since you came to perform on the big stage every Wednesday. Furthermore, even we are being affected, as long as you and your drama keep on playing here, the nobility will not come!” Bella raised her voice, “Who would be willing to sit on greasy and dirty chairs covered with mud bits? I in turn, also do not want to come into a messy theater that your group of country bumpkins have left behind.”

The other side has apparently came to pick a quarrel, May thought, with the sudden appearance of Border Town’s performers, many people from the theater crowd have indeed lost their chance to appear, but by no means is Bella Dean suffering under this effect. According to the news I’ve received from some acquaintances, after my departure from Longsong Stronghold, the theater deliberately tried turning her into the new Star of the West, so they naturally cannot cancel the drama she’s starring in.

Looking at Bella’s action from this point of view, her purpose was clearly evident. Even though it seems she was scolding Irene and the others, in reality, her attack is directed against me. If these people shrink back, I alone cannot perform the Witch Diary and will have no other option than to go back to Border Town in shame. In this way, by defeating them, it is equal to defeating me. Moreover, by recovering an opportunity for the other actors to play, her prestige is also bound to rise; in that way establishing her place as the new generation’s Star of the West.

But I will never become the stepping stone for someone else!

“The theater’s income is falling, are you serious?” May turned and said thoughtlessly, “How can you come up with such a naive judgment as to think that the theater is unable to make ends meet just because of giving away free ticket. The theater manager has undoubtedly reached an agreement with His Royal Highness and Petrov, concluding that the loss of revenue would naturally be paid for by Border Town’s City Hall. This is a business contract, not someone playing house. You really should use your brain rather than rely on your imagination to start shouting and screaming.”

“You... are only talking nonsense!”

“In the end, the decrease of the income is merely because of you and this group of inferior actors with no status.” May showed a faint smile, “There was one time when I was performing at King’s City Grand Theater, which is an open-air theater. It just so happens that on the day of the show it was raining. However, the nobles still came and filled even the last seat. So, you’re saying it is because of the commoners that the nobility is unwilling to watch your show? No, it’s simply that they do not enjoy coming over to watch a play that is performed by a group of monkeys.”

“...” The scene fell into a strange silence, not only did no one step forward to blame them further, they weren’t even trying to find an excuse.

“Finally, you said that the ‘Witch Diary’ is of inferior quality and vulgar; a story about stray dogs struggling and howling in grief?” The corners of May’s mouth rose, her voice however, was bone

chillingly cold, “I may have forgotten to tell you, but it was the Prince who wrote the story for the script. Do you want to tell me that His Highness ideas are low-grade and vulgar? Insulting the royal family is a crime punishable by cutting off the tongue; are you still going to stick with your point of view now?” She looked at the crowd standing behind Bella, “Or do any of you want to give it a try?”

One after another, the more than a dozen actors under her gaze backed away.

“Enough!” Bella clenched her teeth and hissed, “Since you’ve already left for Border Town, you should never have come back! May, do you think I don’t know! The actual reason why you went to that broken place was not to see that idiot Irene, but Morning Light.”

“Bang!”

Bella’s voice stopped with a grunt; a bright red hand print was glowing on her left cheek. She touched her face, not daring to believe what had happened just now, “Y-you actually dare to strike...”

Fuu~ in the end, she had acted on impulse, so she took a deep breath and tried to calm herself. If it went on like this, it could cause some trouble for her later on.

Sure enough, two actors behind Bella stepped forward, “Miss May, you are going to far.”

“Do you know the importance of appearance to an actress; I think that at the very least you need to apologize to her.”

Apologize? Isn't that the same as saying I was the one in the wrong? May couldn't help but to grimly start laughing from the bottom of her heart, the urge to act impulsively returned, but the thought to apologize never even surfaced.

With a calm and collected expression, she sized up the two men with their oily hair and powdered faces, and could not help but think of what Carter Lannis had once told her.

“Do not look at a man's strength, they also have many weaknesses, attacks towards their eyes or throat will make them instantly lose their resistance, of course... there is also the place between their legs. As long as you act decisively and quickly it is not impossible for you to knock down a man much stronger than you.”

Although she wasn't sure how far this could be applied to the current situation, she had already placed her feet into an attacking position, just waiting for the two men to come closer...

However, at this moment, the lounge door was brutally pushed open, an armor wearing knight came in followed by several soldiers with pikes in their hands. As they entered the room, they immediately pointed the pikes at the crowd.

“I heard that somebody had slandered His Royal Highness, and

that a whole crew is conspiring against him.”

May couldn't help but stare blankly, thinking that what she had seen had to be an illusion, she forced herself to blink. However, nothing changed, the man standing in front of her showing her a secret smile was indeed the knight Carter Lannis.

Chapter 278 - Combat Plan

The conflict soon ended.

When they saw the knights threateningly closing in on them, none of them dared to speak up. It was fair to say that the majority of actors were people who moved whichever way the wind blew, otherwise there wouldn't have been a dispute to begin with. It wasn't like everyone had the courage to stand up and confront her, the all too famous May. And now that the situation had completely turned around, Bella was escorted away by the two men as they immediately left the lounge.

Soon after, Carter and Border Town's theater group were the only ones in the huge room.

"Thank you for your help," Gate and the others said as they bowed.

"You were really... too fierce! Two or three of your sentences were already enough to turn her completely speechless." Irene said, grasping May's hands, "Furthermore, that slap, she looked so perplexed, she couldn't do anything but cover it with her hand in her disbelief."

She then turned towards the Chief Knight and saluted, "Sir Carter, for what reason are you in Longsong Stronghold?"

"About this point, I'm also very curious," May said while shrugging with her shoulders, but within her heart, she felt relief.

“Because of His Highness’ orders,” Carter answered and then asked in return, “Can I invite you to a drink?”

“This is... the place where you live?” The Chief Knight appeared somewhat reserved while he surveyed the room.

“Yes, very ordinary, right?” May took a bottle of white wine from the cupboard and poured him a small cup. “The taverns only open at night, so just regard this cup as my invitation to you.” Irene and the rest of the group had quickly slipped away, one by one they suddenly remembered something they had still needed to do. Which left only her and Carter in the group by the time they’d reached the residence.

“Yes, indeed... quite ordinary,” Carter coughed twice, “I’m unaware about your family...”

“My mother passed away when I was still young, I got my father a job in the theater, where he had to do all kinds of easy chores,” May stated serenely, “But I think he will come back in the evening.”

The location of the small cottage was within a dark alley of Longsong Stronghold’s inner city, but she had actually spent all her savings after becoming the Star of the West to purchase it. Even though the house was small and old, but by moving away from the outer city, she at least could get away from harassment and the disturbing peeping Toms.

“Uh... sorry.”

“It’s nothing,” May answered, and gave herself a small cup, “Did His Royal Highness let you come in order to rectify the theater’s social order and solve the disputes between the actors?”

“No, of course not,” Carter repeatedly waved his hands and said, “Timothy has sent some people to the Western Territory to cause some trouble again, because of this, His Highness Roland along with the majority of the Army are currently on the road. I instead took Small Town and arrived beforehand to arrange the Second Army, reinforce the night watch, and alert the Honeysuckle Family as I do so as to prevent someone from raiding the gates and the like.”

“These matters, you shouldn’t have told me,” May said shocked while shaking her head.

“You asked, and it’s not like this is a secret operation,” Carter drank the wine, “rest assured, I still have a sense of discretion.”

“Good,” she answered, curling her lips, “So, how did you get to the theater?”

“After I took care of the matters at hand, all of the sudden I happen to hear about your play and suddenly had the desire to come and see you perform on a real theater stage, wondering what it would look like. And it was just like I thought, even though I could only see the last part of the play, your performance was still

wonderful.” the Knight praised. “So, I went to backstage intending to invite you to a drink, but I didn’t know whether I should come in or not. Thus, I was indecisively wandering in front of the door when I heard the argument inside...”

“You’ve already been outside from early on?” May frowned.

“I did not mean to eavesdrop,” Carter said in defense while he raised his hands. “It’s just an accident, I promise.”

“Puff,” May couldn’t suppress a chuckle and then said in comfort, “I don’t blame you, there is no reason to show an expression like that.”

“You don’t?” The Knight breathed out in relief and reached for the wine, only to get stopped by May.

“You still have night duty, right?” May shook his finger and said, “Therefore, I can only let you drink a small cup and no refill. But...” She smiled, “Wait until the end of the mission, then you can nicely invite me.”

After Carter left, May took another cup of wine and leaned back against the chair.

Since she had tasted the wine for the first time, she discovered that she had slowly started to enjoy its hot and mellow flavor.

As for Carter’s previous invitation, she already had a faint

answer to it within her heart. It is indeed only possible to know the results of some matters after trying them, just like the wine in my hands. Although the first taste was difficult to swallow, but compared with its following richness and mellowness, those sour and sweet fruit wines or the bland ale just can't compare.

After the end of the theater season, I might as well take my father with me and settle in Border Town, right?

Roland arrived in Longsong Stronghold two days later.

Petrov and members of the five families came out of the city to welcome His Highness the Prince and his troops.

After stationing the First Army into the stronghold, Roland went straight to the castle and held a brief meeting.

“I got my hands on reliable news, Timothy has raised a force that is advancing towards the stronghold.” Roland announced after sitting down on the Lord's seat at the top of a flight of steps, while looking down on the nobles gathered beneath, “Their actual number and the route they've taken is unknown, but there is no doubt that they are coming for me. According to Timothy's consistent tactic, they are bound to expand their troops by plundering and enforcing the civilians, and then use drugs to force these people to attack.”

“Excuse me, Your Highness,” the eldest son of the Wolf Family

interrupted puzzled, “The drugs you are speaking about...”

“A type of vicious red pill, that can give civilians more strength than a knight, but after the effect wears off, those who took it can only helplessly struggle before dying.” In addition to Petrov, the other four influential families didn’t know about the Church’s secret medicine, so Roland gave a simple description of the characteristics and the source of the pill. Then he continued, “Through this plan Timothy continues to weaken the resistance of the Western Territory. Any person he cannot use is a target of looting and enforcing, the same goes for your territory. As the Protector of the Western Territory, I request that you clearly explain the situation to your Family’s staff and the commoners staying on your land; and that you transfer all of them into the city, so that Timothy won’t be able to expand his force.”

“But the food and stored goods in our warehouses...”

“You can move as much as possible,” Roland decisively interrupted, “However, I can only give you three days, until then all the commoners in the surrounding have to have been gathered together inside of the stronghold. After I beat back Timothy’s troops, you can all naturally leave.”

After the conclusion of the meeting, the Prince summoned Iron Axe to the castle.

In fact, by no means had he disclosed the exact situation to the nobility. Lightning and Maggie were already able to expose the whereabouts of the troops coming from King’s City. Unlike the previous group of invaders, they were traveling by sailboat this

time, and moving straight along the Redwater River's channel in an attempt to enter the hinterland of the Western Territory by passing through Willow Town.

This was a very thorny route, at the time the enemy came to the river's bifurcation point, they could either follow the tributary to attack Longsong Stronghold's Southern and Eastern Gate or continue following the river westwards and go straight for Border Town.

In order to prevent his defending troops from needing to split up and create a situation of attending to one thing and losing sight of another, he needed to concentrate his superior military strength and take the initiative to go out and defeat the enemy.

Evidently, the Redwater River's bifurcation would be the most suitable place for such an ambush.

Chapter 279 - Battle Line Up

After entering the hall, Iron Axe gave a standard military salute.

“Timothy’s troops are expected to reach the junction in the Redwater River four days from now. The First Army will set off this afternoon,” Roland bluntly spoke. “You will meet up at the battle site with Border Town’s defensive troops and take over the command; I will travel there as quickly as possible.”

“Don’t we need to defend Border Town?”

“All of the enemy’s movements are under the surveillance by Lightning and Maggie. Setting up a defensive division is no longer necessary, just one joint attack to the right side should be enough to smash the enemy.” The Prince paused, “But we also need to leave one hundred soldiers in Longsong Stronghold to watch over those nobles.”

“Remain... here?” Iron Axe asked shocked.

Roland summarized his previous released orders to the five families, “The reason that I gathered them together was to make it more convenient to watch over them. This will keep them from having any thoughts after learning about Timothy’s attack on the Western Territory. The Second Army’s weapons are old and their combat experience is lacking, so in case they encounter an unexpected situation they may not respond to it. However, with the ten squadrons of First Army’s soldiers, we can ensure that the nobles cannot lift any wind and waves. Since I do not want to fight

at the Redwater River junction, only to birth riots at my back.”

“As you bid, Your Highness,” he said.

“Do you have to go?” After Iron Axe had left the hall, Nightingale stepped out from behind the lord’s seat and asked him.

“Of course,” Roland said, “If I do not go, who else could make good use out of Lotus’ ability? I may not be adept at commanding battle strategy, but I’m damn good at using bunkers to seal off roads and tanks to slap faces.”

“Bunker I know of; however, what is this tank?” Nightingale’s face showed her confusion.

“Oh... they are carriages which drag around a cannon,” the Prince coughed twice. “But currently we do not have enough horses, so we have to rely on Little Town to transport the cannons, which like this cannot be called tanks.

“That’s the reason why you picked Honey?” She blinked and asked, “As far as I know, she can even tame tigers and panthers making them as gentle as horses. But aren’t “tanks” nothing more than cannons which are pulled by wild animals?”

“Of course,” Roland couldn’t refrain from tilting his mouth, “The different models can also straightforwardly be named Tiger and Panther.”

Just then, Carter, holding a white-tailed kite in his arms, came in and announced: “Your Highness, there is news from Border Town.”

Roland clapped his hands, immediately after, as if it had intelligence, the white-tailed kite unfolded its wings, freed itself from the knight’s arms and soared into the air, gliding the short distance to firmly land on his shoulder. Feeling the kite land on his shoulder, he took a piece of jerky from his pocket and gave it to the bird to swallow. It also conscientiously raised its claw, so that Roland could easily untie the cloth tied to it.

The kite wasn’t Maggie in her hawk form, it was one of Honey’s trained air messengers. They could remember five to six different people, as well as hundreds of flight routes, even in case that they were brought to an unknown place, they could still find their way home. This time, for his trip to the stronghold, Roland had brought a total of four messengers. Within one hour they could travel from one place to the other and back. Furthermore, they could also fly for a whole day without having to take a break. In the absence of a wireless transmission, this way of keeping in touch counted as the quickest method.

Roland spread out the letter wrapped into the cloth and quickly skimmed over its content.

The author of the letter was Wendy, she was reporting that according to his request she had already carried Lotus, Sylvie, Leaves, Hummingbird, and Nana to the fork of the Redwater River. Some artillery members had also traveled together with them. They’d also taken eight cannons with them, which was the

maximum number of cannons that Little Town could accommodate.

The Prince had estimated that in case Wendy traveled at full speed with Little Town , the cement ship would take about a day to reach the destination. Even though they had Sylvie as their navigator, which made it possible for the ship to travel at night, Wendy's magical source was much smaller compared to Anna's, which meant it was impossible for her to use her ability continuously like Anna could. They would therefore need to rest during the night and travel during the day. So with one trip to and fro taking two days, the four days would be merely enough time for them to have transported sixteen field cannons to the river fork.

Even though their number was less than during the last battle, but taking into account the surprise raid and the fact that the other side was traveling on ships, it would be impossible for the enemy to counterattack. This amount of firepower would be just barely enough to defeat them. Roland took the pen Nightingale offered and wrote a new set of instructions, he ordered the defense troops to immediately arm themselves and set off. Furthermore, after having reached the river fork they were instructed to merge into one large force under Iron Axe's command.

Only half an hour later, the white-tailed kite would have delivered the letter into Scroll's hands, who would then hand it over to Captain Brian.

The next morning, Roland himself arrived at the scheduled

location.

Reaching the place where the clear and gleaming river divided itself in two, one stream flowing towards Longsong Stronghold, the other carrying on until Redwater City.

As the latter river branch was wider, the people used to regard it as the main channel of the Redwater River, while calling the stream leading to the stronghold Little Redwater.

After disembarking, they were immediately welcomed by the witches, who had been waiting at the riverside for a long time.

Looking around, Roland asked, “Wendy?.

“She is already on her way back, together with Little Town,” Leaves reported, “She said that there is another batch of cannons which has to be shipped.”

“I heard that you are going to deal with Timothy Wimbleton, the fake king who hunts for witches within the cities every day.” Lotus could no longer wait and asked, “What is it you want us to do?”

Although Iron Axe and the main force of the First Army had yet to arrive, as long as the witches were here, the preparatory work could still be carried out in advance.

“I need to build a line of defense on both sides of the main river,” Roland explained while squatting down and using a stone to draw

on the ground. “This line represents the enemy’s route forward, so I will split my troops and place them on both sides of the river to launch a sudden pincer attack. However, in order to successfully surprise them, they will have to remain hidden until the attack has begun. So, it is important that you raise a soil house forming a large V-shape on both sides of the river. The houses should have a long form, the walls must be thick, the inside should be divided into eight individual compartments and there should only be small windows on the side of the Redwater River.

“Your Highness, I don’t get it...” Lotus was clearly puzzled, “If you put the soldiers hidden in the soil house you will be able to conceal their whereabouts, but this way they won’t be able to attack the ships on the river, ah. In case the Fake King’s fleet absolutely doesn’t stop nor pulls toward the shore, and instead directly pass by, what should be done then?”

“No, they are unable to make it through,” Roland laughed. “You’ll know why when the time comes.”

Then he turned to Leaves, “You are responsible for covering these fortifications, with weeds and vines so that everything appears more natural.”

“Yes,” Leaves answered.

As a result, when the artillery was pushed into the hidden fortifications, the two soil houses Lotus had thought to be useless were instantly transformed into an “unsinkable battleship”. When the time came around as long as they lifted the cover plate in front of the windows, each compartment could then let out a deadly

flame. It was unlikely that the sixteen field cannons would lose aim because of jolts, in fact, shooting at such a close range, it should be possible to hit the ships sailing in the middle of the river even if their eyes were closed. Granted that the attacks were unable to sink the ships, it should still be sufficient to turn their decks into Asura's realm.

Furthermore, from the very beginning, the enemy will be at the disadvantageous point of the "T", Roland proudly thought, you tell me, being at the "T's" superior position, how could I ever lose?

Chapter 280 - Redwater River Ambush (Part 1)

The enemy's fleet took longer to reach the fork in the Redwater River than expected, instead of late morning it was already afternoon of the fourth day when the ten sailing ships slowly appeared at the end of their field of view.

Receiving this news, Van'er forwarded it to the sixth compartment, turned to the artillery team he was responsible for and gave the order for them to prepare to shoot, then returned to his shooting position.

"Where is the enemy?" Rodney asked while opening the window's cover plate to look around.

"They are at least still several hundred meters away from us," Cat's Claw, in charge of observing the signal flags murmured while he looked through the sky window. "I can't even see their shadows, there are too many weeds on the roof."

Each compartment, in addition to the shooting window, also came with a second window at the top of the wall. After climbing the two steps staircase made of earth, it was possible to see the situation on the Redwater River through the window.

"Speaking of the weeds, the ability of the green hair witch is simply inconceivable," Jop said while wiping away some of the cannon's rust marks. "Wherever she goes, grass grows to be as long and as thin as her hair. After completely covering the

bunkers, they now look completely like ordinary soil hills, there is no difference between the two.

“What green hair witch?” Van’er said beratingly, “That’s Miss Leaves. At the time, when we confronted the Duke’s Knight for the first time, she helped us by planting the vines on both sides of the forest, making it impossible for the Knights to bypass us. Otherwise, they could have gone around us through the wood and attacked us from behind.”

“With their magic, what kind of witch is ordinary?” Rodney asked while he shrugged his shoulders, “One can build those bunkers within one night, the other covers the ground with vines and weeds, one can fly freely in the sky, and one can even change into a giant dove, these are things no mortal could ever do.”

“If I have to choose, the most amazing one is Miss Nana,” Cat’s Claw’s voice was full of longing and expectation, “I do not know if it is an honor to be wounded nowadays. As long as you’re wounded, then you can see her from close range, maybe even hear some comforting words from her.”

“For my benefit, pay careful attention to the enemy’s position!” Van’er snapped, “If any of you dare to talk any more rubbish, I will punish you with cleaning the toilet when we return!”

Hearing the threat, Cat’s Claw stick out his tongue, and then turned his body around to explore the outside situation.

The artillery captain sighed in his heart; nowadays these guys

have lost their sense of tension, they weren't like a few months ago where their hands and feet trembled at the beginning of the battle. He couldn't say if this changes were good or bad, he always felt that some of them held too much contempt towards the opponent, but he also couldn't severely reprimand his men, because he was in no way better than them. Since he had become a soldier of His Royal Highness, Van'er's understanding of battle had undergone changes as great as the difference between sky and earth: The seemingly bloody and cruel fights, no longer had anything to do with your personal strength, skill, and courage. They now only needed repetitive drills to learn all of the necessary steps by heart. Ready themselves according to the rules, meet the enemy according to those rules and open fire according to the rules was equivalent to winning.

Especially when Border Town had to withstand the attack of the new King's Militia, the opponent obviously had astonishing strength, a fierce spirit, and didn't show any fear of death, just like humanoid beasts. But the fight only lasted for half an hour. When it was time to clear the battlefield, he discovered that he didn't feel even the slightest trace of fatigue, as if he had only gone through a warm-up exercise before his training, yet they had already exterminated the enemy.

In this way, will there be a day when they will fight wars over distances where they couldn't even see the enemy's face? Will they be able to wipe out the enemy thousands of miles away just by operating some metallic machines?

Just when Van'er got lost in his own world, he was drawn back by Cat's Claw's warning shout.

“I see the enemy!”

“Fill in the ammunition!” Van’er ordered with a firm voice while shaking his head, pushing all of the distracting thoughts to the back of his head.

The people within the compartment suddenly became busy; they had already gone through the following steps so many times, that they could now fill the cachet and artillery shell into the chamber even if their eyes were closed. Under the circumstances that they didn’t need to reset the cannon into the starting position or to adjust the shooting angle, the artillery group could easily shoot once every twenty breaths.

His Highness Roland and Iron Axe had already planned and put the strategy for the battle long ago. Moreover, it was similar to Border Town’s previous defense battle, so Van’er could fluently recite it from memory. Therefore, the moment they saw Miss Lightning wave the red flag, they immediately tore down the window’s cover plate and opened fire. The two cannons nearest to the river bank were filled with bullet canisters intended to wipe out the deck, while the rest of the cannons bombarded the hold of the ships with their solid shells.

He calmly waited for the arrival of the red signal.

Lotus no longer needed an observation mirror to keep a lookout, she could see that the fleet of the Fake King had already neared the ambush place.

Compared to the three-masted or four-masted seafaring sailing ships, these ships were notably much slimmer, had no tall rigging or fences, and with their low hull, they looked as if they were at the same level of the river. In addition to their bulging sails, they were also pushed forward by sailors on both sides of their decks, who were slowly pulling the helms in their hands.

Even now, His Royal Highness still hadn't issued any new orders.

She could not help but become somewhat anxious; standing at their observation point located at the top of a high hill. Even though they could overlook the whole battlefield from here, it was still far away from the river. Without Lightning or Maggie by His Highness' side, sending new instructions to each team would waste a lot of time, and even if they were only a little late, Lotus was afraid that there wouldn't be enough time to stop the fleet from passing through the Redwater River fork.

Seeing that the leading sailboat was about to pass by the soil houses, Lotus couldn't help but want to open her mouth to inquire, but at that very moment, a loud bang suddenly rolled over the river. As if this were the signal to attack, more than a dozen thick smoke clouds mixed with a blazing flame came spouting out of the soil house, sending an unending oppressive and earth trembling sound across.

In the end, what exactly had happened?

When Lotus turned her eyes back to the river, she could hardly

believe what she was seeing, She didn't see any fight between knights or mercenaries, however, on the deck of the first sailboat, it looked like a boiling pot had just exploded. Wood chips, disabled limbs, and severed arms splashed everywhere in all directions. More than half of the scullers had been killed or injured in a flash, and as the bloody mist cleared up, it had smeared the deck a bloody red.

After losing half of its moving force, the speed of the vessel quickly slowed down, while the thundering explosion sound hadn't stopped for even the slightest moment. Not long after, several shadows cut the tall mast at the center of the ship in half; it shook twice before falling to the ground with a loud bang, burying two knights who had just climbed out of the cabin under it.

The sailboat was pushed by the water current and slowly began receding, while the other ships fanned out while trying to avoid it. After hearing the cacophony of sounds, lots of people rushed out from within the hold of the ship, only to helplessly look at the leading ship which had already sunken into hell, seemingly not knowing what they should do anymore.

Then the horrible attack fell on the second ship.

The bloody mist emerging from the now crowded deck became even more raging, and Lotus could see, that after another round of rolling thunder, those enemies who originally stood nearest to the river bank had been completely broken apart and had given birth to many scarlet red empty spots. Those people who were still alive, gave out heartbreaking screams as they tried to push their intestines back into their body. While other lucky survivors

immediately jumped into the river to try and escape, no longer willing to spend another breath in the hell on top of the deck.

Finally, Lotus understood what His Highness had meant when he said that they would not be able to get through, but... how had his men been able to do this?

Chapter 281 - Redwater River Ambush (Part 2)

Compared with Lotus who could only survey the scene from an elevated and distant position, Sylvie's view was much more vivid.

Through the thick walls of the soil houses, she could see the soldiers busy themselves in an orderly manner, everyone was repeating the same single motion, but all seven to eight people became one complex whole and moved like clouds and flowing water. The paper bags and iron balls stacked at the back of the compartment, were continuously fed into a thick and robust iron pipe, which then erupted with the sound of thunder.

Taking a closer look, Sylvie noticed that the soldiers first lit a rope that was at the end of the iron pipe. The jumping sparks then entered the interior of the pipe and directly ignited the previously loaded paper bag. In the following split second the light became so bright that she was unable to bear keeping her eyes open, the sparks quickly expanded into an orange-red fireball, filling every room in the pipe. With no further place left for it to go, the still growing flame then pushed against the iron ball, ejecting it outward as if a giant hand had thrown it out!

Within the blink of an eye, the iron ball turned into a shadow rushing in a straight line towards the ship sailing on the river. Its strength was so great, that it directly drilled through the planks leaving a fist sized hole in the side. Although its speed slowed down a lot the iron ball's power could still not be underestimated. When it hit one enemy that was trying to climb out of the cabin it immediately tore him in two.

It was Sylvie's first time witnessing such a scene – that without the blade of a sharp knife or the edge of a sword, depending on just one of those plumb iron balls, it was possible to tear a person in two.

Due to witnessing the scene from too close, it even felt as if the blood and guts had splashed all over herself. The still not stopped iron ball then hit several more people, not only cutting off their four limbs but also shattering their heads. For a moment, the cabin was full of flowing filthy blood, and red and white internal organs.

Sylvie suddenly felt her stomach rolling over and over, and stomach acid came rushing straight along her throat.

“Blergh...” The scene in the hold of the ship suddenly faded – under her chaotical emotional state she was no longer able to keep on using her ability. Sylvie forcefully interrupted the connection to her Eye of Truth giving up to the impulse to throw up instead.

“What happened?” Lotus was startled, so she immediately came over to support her then worriedly asked, “Are you okay?”

The Prince also noticing her discomfort turned around and handed her a handkerchief, “If you think it is too bloody, then don't look at it. At least don't use your ability to look at it from a close range. For now, first go and take a break.”

“Thank you...” Sylvie took the handkerchief and wiped her mouth. “I'm all right.”

This is probably the “incredible invention” Maggie and Lightning had spoken of, but back then we hadn’t listened enough to it or we didn’t pay any attention to it. After all, without personally witnessing it, such an incredible weapon is really hard to imagine.

She once more looked towards the battlefield, to see that Timothy’s fleet had begun approaching both shores – apparently, they have already noticed by now, that this kind of violent wind and rainstorm is coming from the soil houses at the shores that are disguised as earth slopes. However, the other side still isn’t aware that the military fortification arranged by His Highness Roland has far more to offer than that.

Comparatively far away from the V-shaped line of defense, were some more bunkers that were hidden with vines and weeds. Which had a length exactly the same as the length of the fleet column. If they landed at any point, they would just fall into another pincer attack laid out for them from the beginning, the only way to avoid this would have been if they had turned the bow around and withdrew without even the slightest hesitation.

The soldiers in the bunkers were all holding identical long and round iron instruments, these didn’t shoot out round iron balls but rather a single sharp but tailless arrowhead. It didn’t seem as if it had the same unstoppable power as the iron balls, but when it hit the target, it still turned any armor useless before drilling deep into the flesh of a person’s body.

Sylvie guessed that the enemy had planned to launch a counterattack after going ashore and lining up, however, the

soldiers within the bunkers never even gave them the opportunity to do so – just as with the previous attack, they also didn't need to show their faces this time. Instead, they aimed at the target with their weapons, easily pulled the trigger, then sent off a rain of arrowheads; similar to a summer storm splashing down on the enemy.

Confronted with this kind of rapid-fire, without even being able to swing their own weapons, the enemy was unable to resist for long before the frontlines totally fell apart. The people who had already left the ship all turned around, wanting to return aboard, while the people still aboard were waiting for the others to flee. The body of the ships substantially began to sway, until the gangplank was no longer able support their weight and fell into the water drowning many of them, while some other people trying to climb the wall of the ship were also killed off, which turned the whole scene into utter chaos.

“It's time,” After waiting until this moment, the Prince put down his observation mirror, turned toward Iron Axe and ordered, “Take the reserve and clean up the battlefield, if the lead knights were lucky enough not to be killed during the battle, arrest as many as you can. I want to ask them some questions.”

“Yes,” Iron Axe answered as he saluted.

He then looked at Sylvie, “Go with Iron Axe and ensure that no one can slip away.”

Sylvie nodded, and followed after the First Army Commander as they moved away from the observation hill. She suddenly

understood why His Royal Highness Roland would dare to openly protect the witches here in the corner of the mainland... With such a dominant force in his hands, it isn't known whether the Church will be able to beat him even if they sent out their God's Punishment Army. If Lady Tilly can also get her hands on these weapons, maybe there will come a day when us witches will be able to return to our homeland.

As he looked down at the paralyzed sailboats standing at the river shore, Roland finally let out a breath of relief.

The moment the enemy had decided to land and launch a counter attack was the moment they were fated to lose the battle – merely relying on poles and paddles to turn around the bow would have been a very slow process, even more so under a constant artillery attack which might have been the reason the opposition hadn't turned around and withdrawn. They might have thought that instead of suffering a beating without the slightest chance to hit back, it would be better to hurriedly reach the shore so that they could organize the team for a counter offensive.

However, it would be difficult to completely sink a wooden sailboat by relying on the field cannons' iron balls which weighed a mere 12 pounds. Even if the hull had been covered in holes, it still wouldn't be enough damage and the ship would still remain floating. So, while they might have suffered heavy losses as they turned around, they would've at least have been able to save one or two of their ships, but, by choosing to land, their whole fleet was doomed to be wiped out.

Compared to the last surprise attack at Longsong Stronghold and Border Town's defense battle, the enemy wasn't even able to start an attack at all this time – the pills were usually controlled and held onto by the commander until it was time to attack. Therefore, they were unable to respond quickly enough when the ambush began.

It was not until evening that the work of cleaning up the battlefield finally came to an end.

By that time Iron Axe and a few personal guards had already entered the camp with two captives.

Even before Roland had the time to ask, one of them had already started shouting out loud: "I'm Knight Sznak. Your Highness, please allow me to write a letter to my family. They will certainly offer a rich ransom."

"I am the second son of the Shield Family from the Northern Border, Elvin Shield. Your distinguished Highness," the other immediately followed, "I am also willing to pay the ransom."

"So... the present attack was led by you?" Roland asked as he raised his brow.

"Well, no. The captain was Sir Vincent, but he is dead now." Knight Sznak twisted his body, "Your Highness, could you let your man untie my hands? I hope to receive the traditional treatment during the redeeming period."

“I do not need a ransom,” the Prince said while shaking his head, “The target of your coming to the Western Territory, the plan, as well as the further intention of Timothy... Tell me everything you know, and I will probably give you what you deserve.”

“This... Please forgive me, I can’t tell you that,” Sir Sznak said after hesitating for a moment.

“I have already vowed my loyalty and devotion to His Majesty Timothy,” the young man of the Shield Family said, “This would be against my oath.”

“Then so be it,” Roland answered, not taking exception to it, “Take them away for now.”

After the guards had brought them away, Roland glanced towards Iron Axe and asked, “I heard that you served as the Patriarch’s guard during your stay in Iron Sand City, and that you are excellent at gathering intelligence through interrogation, is that right?”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness,” Iron Axe stated, “There are very few people who can hide information from me.”

“Well, I will give these two men to you for interrogation,” Roland turned to leave, “Your manner and methods are not limited, as long as you get enough information everything is acceptable.”

Iron Axe got shocked and began to say, “The ransom...”

“From the beginning, I have already said that I don’t need payment,” Roland coldly said, “When the questioning comes to an end, treat it as if they had fallen during battle.”

This is the what they deserve after oppressing and seizing commoners then coming to invade the Western Territory. He added within his heart.

Chapter 282 - “Stage”

The day after returning to Border Town’s Castle, Iron Axe brought all the information that he’d been able to gather during the interrogation.

“These people were only Timothy’s advance troops?” Roland asked with a frown.

“That is indeed the case, Your Highness,” Iron Axe answered while nodding, “Just like you have previously guessed. Sending one militia troop after another is Timothy Wimbleton’s combat tactic. Apart from the Western Territory, Timothy has also used the same method to deal with Garcia Wimbleton’s Port of Clear Water.”

“Is the force completely made up out of commoners?”

“Not all of them. Some of those people are also criminals or rats, but most of them are refugees who have been seized from all across the country.” He replied, “According to the enemy knight, these people have all been pressed into service. First, they got lured with some verbal promises, and then later they had to take those pills. As a result, they have no other choice than to accept being controlled by Timothy, only in that way will they get further pills to ease their pain and longing.”

“But they do not know that once they swallowed the pill, there is no possibility of treatment,” Roland sighed, “Taking more pills just delays their death.”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness. Timothy didn’t inform the people about the side effect of the drugs. Instead, they believed that the ‘new King’ would fulfill his promises after the war and give them remuneration and a new identity.”

“What is the target of this force?” Roland asked.

“Border Town,” Iron Axe quickly replied, “According to what they had heard from Knight Vincent who had fallen during battle, they believe that Border Town doesn’t possess a city wall, which would make it easier for him to achieve his goal of a war of attrition. He’d expected that with a force of one thousand drugged militia he would be able to cause about three thousand casualties; which would be a severe blow for Border Town, but...”

“But what?”

“Knight Sznak confessed that Timothy has also handed them another mission, they were to divide the militia into several small groups intending to attack Border Town in waves. In this way they could ensure their safety while it would also be possible for them to observe your response pattern and combat effectiveness. I think... by now he should already have received the answer to this question, since there was no report from the lead knight who was meant to command the previous attack.”

“This time there will once again be no one returning,” The Prince said nonchalantly, “Since the advance army was used as consumables, did the two knights know anything about the plans

of the follow-up troops?”

“Not much, only that its scale would be much larger than that of the previous two attacks.”

Hearing this, Roland’s gritted his teeth, and his mind immediately flooded with hatred, not only are you forcing people into labor, but now you are also sending one wave after another to me as cannon fodder? Even if I’m able to prevail over my enemy without any loss, it will still be a tragic victory. Compared to resisting Timothy’s invasion, it was even more important for me to put a stop to this insignificant war – otherwise, after I finally manage to unify Graycastle, how long will I have to wait for the population to prosper again?

“After the arrival of the Months of Demons, all of the Western Territory land routes between the cities will be sealed off by snow, thus a large armed force won’t be able to move even a single step. However, if they try to come over with ships, the whole process would take a very long time. Not to mention the tremendous cost, it is also quite easy to intercept it on route,” he said. “So, if he still wants to launch another campaign this year, he will have to act before the first snow of winter. And he will have to rake in the population even earlier than that, he would have to completely enlist the militia before winter starts.”

“You intend to...”

Roland closed his eyes, and started to gather his thoughts, then he said. “I want to delay this war.”

“Do you want to send him an envoy or a diplomatic letter? I’m afraid that it is unlikely that Timothy Wimbledon will do as you wish.” Iron Axe said in a low voice.

“No, that wouldn’t be very useful,” Roland said slowly, “Ultimately, if I want to dispel all of his thoughts of starting another offensive, I will first have to reduce the population he can enforce. Secondly, I will have to make him realize that a war of attrition would not make any sense, and also implant a fear of what would happen if he ever tries to invade the Western Territory again. Originally I had intended to have Barov spread the news that the Western Territory had opened up new land, and in this way attract those people living outside of the cities, but now it seems that this would have been much too slow, and the measure is also too conservative. If I want to gather those people before Timothy can lay his hands on them, it will have to happen in the same way as the last trip to King’s City. By taking the initiative to go and recruit them. The most important area is the Southern Territory which has been suffering under the constant flames of war, followed by the northern part of the kingdom. I estimate that I will need to dispatch the First Army if I want to carry out this plan.”

“If you merely want to recruit, I believe that a team of fifty people would be enough,” Iron Axe suggested without hesitation, “After all, we won’t operate in the city vicinity, so there will be no need to worry about any confrontation with the enemy.”

“First let me think of a plan; after I’m done, I’ll call you to see me again,” Roland nodded.

The main force needs to remain inside of Border Town as a defensive measure. Furthermore, the team which will be sent out has to be back before the Months of Demons begins. Furthermore, there is also the issue of whether we have enough gold royals and food: A more active attraction policy will naturally pull in more people, but at the same time, it will also increase the costs. The previous program was relatively cost-effective, but now with an important objective, it is even more necessary to carefully consider how it should be implemented.

“Regarding the second point you mentioned... what do you plan to do?”

“First we have to let off the news by sending the captive commoners back to King’s City. This way Timothy will be able to become aware of the course of the battle – telling him that something like this is to no avail, so he should never try and do it again.”

“However, by doing this, our artillery warfare will also be exposed.” Iron Axe interjected in worry.

“We didn’t reveal anything of value,” Roland said, while tapping on the table, “Besides learning about the long striking range and the incredible power, he won’t be able to learn the principle, so he won’t be able to manufacture it for himself.” As long as the level of industrialization remains at the current era’s, he won’t be able to resist even if he’s already aware of it. Hot weapons are just too overwhelmingly superior to cold weapons. Even with a strong will, good tactics, and a large number of people, it will still be nearly

impossible to reverse the situation. “Also, those people will also send him a warning letter.”

“Warning Letter?”

“That’s right, the letter will be a notice containing the date and time of an attack. I plan to attack King’s City on that day.” The Prince calmly said, thoroughly emphasizing each word.

“...” For a long time Iron Axe merely kept on staring at Roland, his mouth hanging wide open in shock. Then by the time he came back to himself, he solemnly and respectfully stood at attention, gave a salute, and said, “As long as you order it, I will give my life for victory!”

“Relax, I’m not thinking about sending you out to die,” Roland gave a reassuring smile. “My plan does not need the First Army to participate; the witches will do it on their own.”

How is it possible to make Timothy afraid of the Western Territory? I don’t think anything less than a direct attack against the palace would ever shake him to his roots. All thoughts of dispatching troops should vanish, after he realizes that there is no place where he will ever be safe.

Roland envisioned the dropping of leaflets out of planes during later generations. However, instead of delivering leaflets, Roland intended to send Timothy two bombs – the so-called surprise attack of a bomb dropping from the sky. The possibility of directly killing the new King with it was minuscule, but as long as it could

play a deterring role, it could still be considered as a successful mission.

However, whether the other side would stop insisting on launching a large-scale attack because of this would be very difficult to determine.

Roland was clearly aware of the fact that the pattern of the Battle for the Throne had changed. He was no longer so weak that he needed to disguise himself and hide, as he did at first after crossing over. It was now finally time for him to show his hand. Step by step he was climbing up to Graycastle's political stage, finally making the people of the Kingdom pay attention to his existence – this had nothing to do with any desire to show off, rather it was intended to propagandize the power of his territory.

It was useless to obtain a kingdom in ruins, and fields that were plastered with corpses. He hoped that with this declaration, even more people would be motivated to travel to the Western Territory and stand by his side.

As the sun sunk behind the mountains, Roland opened the windows of his office. The evening breeze brushing past his face, no longer was it burning hot, instead it contained a trace of chill.

Autumn was approaching.

Chapter 283 - Hydrogen Balloon Delivery

On the third day after the start of fall, the fleet from Margaret's Chamber of Commerce docked at Border Town's pier.

This time, the size of the fleet had already returned to the scale of the past, ten sailboats laid in a row, firmly docked at the side of the pier.

"Most Honorable Prince, we meet once again," Gammon the merchant from the Crescent Moon Bay said while he bowed in greeting, "According to Miss Margaret, the transformation of the first steam powered ship has been completed."

"That's true," Roland acknowledged laughingly, "However, in order to ensure the quality of the goods, it is still required to go through a three to four days sea trial. So that we can test its reliability and power of the system."

"I am really looking forward to seeing it in action," Margaret said while happily clapping her hands. "That's about the time we will have to wait for the fleet to unload anyway, so we will stay here and wait for it. May I ask if it is possible to go about and look around during the sea trial?"

"Of course. It is, after all, an entirely new kind of ship. Its handling is completely different from any sailboat in the past, so I will have to show you how to operate it anyway. However, according to the schedule, this will only happen tomorrow." Roland gave them the signal to follow and said, "For now the most

important matter is for you to relax your tired bodies, have you had any lunch yet? I have a sumptuous banquet prepared in the castle hall.”

“Every time we come to visit you here, there is a very satisfying meal for us to enjoy,” Margaret covered her smile and confessed, “By now I am really hungry, and my stomach is already crying out loud – those wheat cakes and pieces of dried meat are as hard as stones, and also very difficult to swallow.”

During this era, there was still not any reliable food preserving technology, therefore, if it was called ‘dry food’ it would be very dry and hard. Which inevitably had made Roland think of canned food. When the light industry was fully developed, manufacturing all kinds of delicious and convenient canned food which was suitable for long-distance traveling and sailing merchants would absolutely be the best choice.

When the feast came to an end, Hogg patted his belly with a satisfied smile on his face and said, “This bowl of mushroom soup made me unable to stop my tongue from swallowing. I also seemed to have tasted some seafood, it also had the flavor of stewed chicken and pig bones, the skills of your court chef is truly quite excellent.”

“I much prefer the dessert that was served after the dinner, which is called ice cream... correct?” Margaret said. “I’m guessing that you made it out of milk and honey, then froze it using saltpeter into its current state of crystalline ice.”

“You also have to add some butter and egg white. Otherwise, you won’t be able to get the soft and waxy texture,” Roland added, “How much saltpeter is there this time?”

“Still only one vessel,” the business woman shook her head. “The Alchemist Association is still wantonly purchasing saltpeter; the Imperial Prime Minister even sent out the patrol to help plunder the saltpeter fields. Even though that group is carrying the mighty name of sage; there is still no difference between them, and a gang of robbers, this one ship of saltpeter also came from Redwater City.”

“So, this month’s goods are for the largest part washing stones?”

“That’s right,” Hogg drained the cup of white spirit in one gulp and then poured himself another before saying, “Although the amount may be a little too much this time, it is still deeply engraved within my heart, that you told me to get as many as possible last time. In addition to washing stones, there are also the best iron ingots and lead ingots. Recently, apart from you here, there are very few cities and towns which need this stuff,” he sighed, “The mining business is getting worse and worse.”

This is the effect brought on by the civil war, Roland thought to himself, the purchasing power is progressively declining in all parts of the country. In case that this continues for the next two to three years, the food price will go up tremendous and there will be starving people everywhere.

“Oh, that’s right, what kind of problems have recently occurred in the Western Territory?” Margaret suddenly asked.

“What happened?”

“When the fleet was on its way to Border Town, we met a lot of... well,” she paused for a moment, considering the words she should use, “a lot of ‘floating corpses’. They were dressed in rags and were mushy from rotting. Furthermore, there were so many of them floating that they covered the whole river channel from one side to the other. Apart from the corpse, there were also some broken planks and ropes that were floating on the water surface. It looked as if a ship had hit a reef, sunk, and thus ceased to exist. However, there is no reef in the river, so I thought...”

“Well, those were the remains of Timothy’s fleet which he used to try and invade the Western Territory with,” Roland put on a look of indignation, and told the story of the fight a week ago. “They have gotten the punishment they deserved.”

In order to avoid blocking the ship channel and spreading a contagious plague, he had transferred Anna and Lily from Border Town, after cleaning the battlefield. One was responsible for burning all the remains of the ships, while the other was responsible for purifying the water. But since Margaret still saw the floating corpses, she mustn’t have been far away from the actual fight to have passed the place so soon after the end of the battle.

“So that’s the reason,” the merchant said with a smile. “It seems as if Timothy has hit a wall on both sides.”

“On both sides?”

“There was also Garcia’s Port of Clear Water – the latest news I received was that the looters who attacked the cities of the Eastern Territory were actually Garcia’s men. After looting everything from the Sea Wind Region and Valencia, the Black Sail Fleet went further North along the coastline instead of returning to the harbor, who knows where she finally landed.”

“North...” Roland asked in surprise, “Did she leave Graycastle?”

“For now that seems to be the case. Timothy’s troops have already thrown themselves against an already evacuated Port of Clear Water which left it as a ghost city.” Margaret stated, “There were a lot of rats within the force he brought along, so that’s why all of these are well-known secrets within the streets. No matter what, you are the only thorn left remaining in his side, thus in the future, it is quite possible that his attempts to invade the Western Territory will become even more and more frequent.”

“If you ever want to leave Graycastle, Crescent Half-Moon Bay will welcome you at any time,” Marlan offered.

“That’s right,” Gammon agreed while patting his chest, “The island is sufficient enough to contain ten Border Towns, and we are even willing to provide for you and your people free of charge.”

You merely want me to hand over the technology for the steam engine and steam paddler, right? Roland rolled his eyes in his

mind, even if I couldn't stay in Graycastle any longer, the first person I would seek shelter from would be Tilly Wimbledon. On the surface however, he still smiled and replied, "Alright, if such a day ever comes about."

"Oh, by the way," He turned towards Margaret, "Last time you placed an order for the investigation balloon; I've already succeed to fabricate two."

"So fast?" The latter was pleasantly surprised, "Can you take me to see it?"

"Of course, please, come with me," Roland said and then got up to leave.

Arriving at the castle backyard, they saw an already completely inflated hydrogen balloon.

The balloon had a waterdrop-like shape, it was wide at the top, and narrow at the bottom. It had a diameter of five meters at the top, and in accordance with the size of the test sample, it could carry one grown man and lift off. The air sac and ropes were coated with a sky like camouflage, so if that were paired with the observer also wearing camouflage, it would reduce the chance of it being detected to the minimum.

"It doesn't seem to be the same as the balloon we rode on last time, right?" Margaret carefully sized up the new product.

“That’s because you can use it even without witches,” Roland cleared his throat and then began to introduce how to use the investigation balloon. “At the end of the air sac is a movable valve, through which gas can enter and come out of – it is precisely this alchemical gas filling which allows the balloon rise up and fly. The inflation method is very simple, as long as the matching hose and gas tank are connected, you merely have to open the valve on both ends.” After finishing the verbal exploration, he went through the demonstration of the deflation and inflation process in front of everyone.

“How many bottles are needed to fill a balloon?” Margaret quickly caught the key point.

“Five bottles or six bottles...” This question made Roland slightly embarrassed, “Definitely no more than seven bottles.” The main reason for the variation laid in the problem, that the density of the diluted sulfuric acid -which was necessary to produce hydrogen in the bottle-is hard to control. It would be a waste of valuable human resources to first purify the sulfuric acid to 98% only to later dilute it with water again.

“Is this alchemical gas very expensive?”

“It is indeed. It is also hard to conserve and full of dangers... That is, when it is carelessly handled,” Roland coughed twice, “Therefore, you can only store the gas tanks for a year at most, and it should neither be knocked over, disassembled or burned. Otherwise, it could have serious consequences.” He paused for a moment to let his words settle. Then continued, “Although the

price is somewhat expensive, rest assured. When purchasing the investigation balloon for the first time, the first batch of gas tanks ordered from Border Town will be free of charge. In addition, you can also get an extra set of sky camouflaged investigator clothes.”

Chapter 284 - Companion

It was only after the fleet had departed that Roland could finally breathe out in relief.

Finally... the treasury is filled up once again.

A total of eight steam engines were handed over to the three merchant guilds. From those eight, three had been produced by Factory No. 2, which was set up with the assistance of the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan – Roland had to acknowledge that regarding the artisans from the Fjords, no matter, if it was their innate skills or their capacity to learn, all were far higher than that of Border Town's miners or blacksmiths. After grasping the operating procedure of the machines, their passing rate for finished products immediately began rising. Perhaps after another two more months, the production capacity of Factory No. 2 will have caught up to that of Factory No. 1. Fortunately, according to the signed contract, the income from the sale of those machines would entirely be owned by Roland.

In addition, he has also received a new purchasing order for the hydrogen balloon from the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan, Marlan was very interested in an item like this that could increase range of vision greatly. In addition to a single person detection balloon, he also specially asked for a custom-made giant balloon with the capacity to carry three to four people, which he intended to use for the exploration of the Fjord's new islands.

Including with the delivery of the first steam paddler, all three items had brought Border Town an income of close to seven

thousand gold royals. After deducting the costs for buying goods such as metal ingots, washing stones, grain and other commodities, the remaining six thousand gold royals should be sufficient to support his population expansion plan.

Thus, Roland called Barov and Iron Axe into his office.

“Now that the treasury is full again, it is time to recruit more foreign citizens.” He looked at the two able men, “This task will be carried out by a cooperation of the City Hall and First Army, which specific personnel you assign will be your decision, I will merely brief you with the rough details of the mission.”

“Please speak,” the Prime Minister said with a nod.

“Recruitment will be split into two areas, the North and the South.” Roland took a map and placed it on the table then spread it out in front of the other two, “Especially the area between Eagle City and Port of Clear Water... I suspect that Timothy regards these people as members of Garcia’s group, thus turns them into useless people who he can consume as he wishes. Therefore, you need to rush over to be the first who tries to rope them in.”

“The team sent out by the City Hall will be responsible for attracting the nobles, artisans, and other literate people. While the First Army’s main task is to recruit the commoners. Compared with the previous propaganda missions, this time the strategy must be more active, do you understand what I mean by that?”

Iron Axe hesitated a moment and then asked in uncertainly, “You

mean... dragging along by force?”

“Keke, such a method isn’t necessary,” Roland coughed twice, the Sandpeople’s style was really straightforward and cruel, “For example by giving away food for free, taking the initiative to convince them using advance payment of living expenses, etc.” He turned his view to Barov, “You should be very clear about this kind of stuff.”

“Of course, Your Royal Highness, previously as a cabinet minister I have aided the patrol to suppress or pacify riots of refugees several times,” the latter said. “This request is quite simple, sometimes it’s already enough to merely feed them until they are full. Therefore, there is no need to use money to rope them in; don’t even start talking about remuneration with them – if the conditions seem too generous, they will become suspicious. However, the arrogant aristocrats will prove troublesome. Although they are currently hard pressed for money and no longer so well-off, they are still experienced and knowledgeable, so their demands will also be higher. It’s unlikely that they will go on a long-distance trek simply to receive a steamed bun. To lure them it’s required that we coerce them with money and promises.”

Roland clapped twice, “It is a pity that there are so many responsibilities for you here in Border Town that you can’t go out in person. Otherwise, the success of this mission would be guaranteed”

“Please rest assured, Your Royal Highness, I shall dispatch the disciple whom I’m the most pleased with,” Barov said with a smile, “To establish Border Town as a city next year; it’d be nice if both

sides of the Redwater River could be covered with houses.”

“It’s possible that such a day will come.”

After the two men asked for leave, Roland leaned back against his chair to rest for a short period; he decided to go to the yard at the North Slope to see Anna.

Stepping through the door, the first thing to enter his view was a pile of metal cubes.

Roland picked up one piece and held it in his hand – they were basically all of the same size, about five centimeters long and wide. The surface wasn’t smooth at all. It looked as if they all come out of a press, there was also a number engraved on one side. For example, on top of the piece in his hand was written the number “256”.

“How was it? Were you able to discover any better one?”

“No. 1057 and No. 2284, are exceptionally hard, compared to the others, regardless of their hardness or toughness, both are excellent,” Anna answered after coming over to greet him with a bright smile.

“Were you already able to climb over two thousand?” Roland asked in astonishment; and took the record handed over by Lucia, it was completely filled with data. Seeing No. 2284, he discovered that there were several numbers written on it, ‘carbon content of

0.8%, 15.2% of unknown elements.’”

“Well, this is more satisfying than cutting gun barrels,” Anna confessed with a wink, “Whether it is unexpectedly possible to create such earth-shaking changes to its characteristics by mixing iron pieces together with other metals, is something I really look forward to finding out. I want to know how these metal pieces work.”

Anna and Lucia’s current exploration was a far-reaching task.

Roland let the little girl first break down the ore into its raw materials before Anna then mixed and melted them together according to the different mass ratios. Afterward they would then test the performance of these pieces – by stretching and squeezing it under the heat of Anna’s black flame. Through observing the actual time taken and amount of magic power it took, Anna could distinguish between its strength and toughness.

The first material to add had obviously been carbon.

Even though Roland knew that the essence of steel was a type of iron and carbon alloy: with too much carbon it would become pig iron, and without any carbon it was pure iron, when the carbon content was within a certain range would turn into steel, etc. However, even with just a small fluctuation it could already greatly change the metal’s properties, so the first thing they needed to measure would be the size of that range.

Within the history records he had seen, before 1500 they had only

used mixtures made out of pure iron and carbon for smelting, but after 1500 they began adding new elements on top of a steel foundation. Roland thoroughly understood that every additional element in the sequence could potentially increase the results many times over, which would turn into a very long process. Therefore, he only allowed Anna to advance her exploration if she had finished all the important manufacturing tasks.

He encouraged the two witches with a few words then sat to the side, quietly enjoying the rear view of the busy Anna.

After entering autumn, the sun was still shining brightly, but it was already no longer as cruelly hot as during the last month of summer. Instead, his body now felt nice and warm, and a long lost feeling of calmness spread throughout his heart.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but the yard gradually quieted down. He felt a soft hand being placed on his forehead, when he narrowly opened his eyes. He saw that Lucia had already disappeared and that Anna was sitting in front of him, "You have something you want to say to me?"

"..."

"It was your eyes which told me," she said while leaning forward, letting her hair fall down naturally, resembling strands of translucent gold silk.

Roland hesitated, but then shook his head and helplessly replied, "I'm just a little confused." He told her about his population

expansion plan before continuing, “Compared with my original intention of free choice, now in order to seize time, I have to use a combination of half luring and half forcing. Although I’m doing this to avoid Timothy pressing them into his army to die under the eroding effect of the pills. However, if I think seriously about this, my way of handling things isn’t that different from his... the only difference would be the purpose.”

“Can’t you explain your purpose to them?” She asked softly.

“But...”

“I know what you want to say,” Anna covered the Prince’s mouth. “You are worried that they won’t appreciate your act of kindness, furthermore you also can’t guarantee that your objective will forever stay so proper in the future – being misunderstood because you used the wrong method while trying to achieve a good goal, or using the right methods but committing an irrevocable mistake... In the end, you do not know if it is more important for you to use the correct method or to hold on to the right objective. Am I right?”

“Be at ease,” Anna immediately answered her own question, not even giving him the chance to say anything. She put her hands on his cheeks, softly whispering into his ear, “I’m here... I’ll always make sure that you look good.”

Chapter 285 - Answer

Sleeping Island's living environment became better by the day. The further Tilly rose into the air, the more she could see of the coming and going crowd and the bustling market.

This place was no longer the secluded place where three hundred witches had all been living in isolation. Through negotiations and agreements, some of the Fjord's Islands like Crescent Moon Bay, Twin Dragon Island, Sunset Port and Shallow Water Town had all established trading routes with Sleeping Island. Even going so far, that some ordinary people from overcrowded island villages had decided to settle down on Sleeping Island.

Although they were currently living in the outer region of the island, far apart from the witches, Tilly believed that there would come a day where Sleeping Island would become one big city. The fusion was a slow-moving process, but it left one brimming with expectation to see the result. The best news however, was that no matter if the witches, were living on other islands or were already locals when they awakened, they would all become members of Sleeping Island. Which meant that Tilly and her migrants would be able to regularly obtain new supporters.

"Come down, the wind is rising," Ashes shouted from below, "And be careful not to fall!"

"I'm fine!" Tilly waved her hand. But all of a sudden, her body dropped down. Only after falling a short distance was she able to stabilize herself again, "Oh... it is still a bit hard for me to control."

“I knew that your control isn’t good enough to fly so high!” Ashes stamped with her foot, “Next time you will only fly at a lower height or go over to the sea! If you don’t come down immediately, I will climb up the roof and catch you myself.”

“Alright, alright, I got it,” Tilly indeed felt the wind growing stronger and stronger. So she decided to no longer to show off or try to be brave, instead gathering her magic and releasing it so as to slowly land in the garden.

“Next time, if you want to do something like this, call Molly first.” Ashes’ eyes were wide open as she reprimanded her, “At least her magic servant could catch you if you were to fall.”

“As long as I keep up the magic supply, it is impossible to fall. The worst that could happen is that I couldn’t control the direction,” she took the glove with the blue magic stone off and handed it to Ashes, “You also have to try it, next. The feeling of flying is simply incredible. When you overlook Sleeping Island from up high in the sky, it will feel as if the whole world has become something entirely new.”

“I’d rather not,” Ashes waved dismissively, “From the beginning, I have always been unable to activate the lightning magic stone, so don’t even mention continuously providing the stone with magic. Furthermore, there is also only one, even if I’m able to grasp the control skill, there is no way for me to fly with you.”

“Then let it be,” Tilly regrettably said, taking the gloves back. “I always believed that if we could figure out the principle behind it, there is the possibility that we can manufacture similar magic

stones.”

“Do you think those stones are man-made?”

“Without a doubt,” she nodded without hesitation. “No matter if it is their polished exterior appearance or their particular applications, it is unlikely that those stones were formed naturally. It seems that the group who inhabited the ruins had a much deeper understanding of magic than we did, it’s just a pity that they didn’t leave any more clues than a bunch of incomprehensible scrolls.”

At this moment, a huge white figure suddenly fell from the sky. Due to the speed at which it fell being too fast, it practically smashed into the ground with a thud, lifting out a circle of dust.

“Maggie?” Ashes lifted her eyebrows.

“Ooooh... that’s extremely painful, goo,” The little girl that was lying on the ground said as she rubbed her head and stood up. “Just now, were my eyes playing tricks on me? Lady Tilly can actually fly in the sky! If it wasn’t that you had the wrong color of hair, I would have believed you were Lightning.”

“You were not mistaken, I just flew in the air,” Tilly said while rubbing her cheek with a smile, “how about... are the witches who went to live in Border Town doing well?”

“All fine, goo, they asked me to deliver a letter to you,” Maggie said, flipping her bag over to find some letters. “This is Lotus’s,

this is Evelyn's, and this one... is from His Highness."

For a moment, Tilly could only stare dumbfounded when she saw the one foot and half a finger thick letter which had been sent by the Prince. It was wrapped so tightly, that it resembled a parcel more than it did a letter. It was even so heavy, that it caused her hands to drop down a bit, which made it obvious that this wasn't just a simple letter.

"You've worked hard."

Ashes took out one-half of a wheat cake, broke it into small pieces and handed it over to Maggie. However, the latter merely shook her head, put a dried fish into her mouth and vaguely said, "I'm off to play with Molly." Then she turned back into the large white pigeon, flapped her wings and flew out of the flower garden.

"Why do I get the feeling, that after one month she's somehow become bigger?"

"I have the same feeling," Tilly laughed, "Perhaps the life in Border Town is quite good."

Back at her house, she tore open Roland Wimbledon's letter. Within, she discovered that besides a sheet full of written content, the more than a dozen remaining pages were unexpectedly some vivid and lifelike pictures.

"What are those?"

Ashes' question exactly reflected Tilly's own puzzlement. She shook her head, took out one of those painted sheets and spread it out – the content on top was somewhat hard for her to believe: The background resembled a wasteland in the evening. Under the bloody red light of the setting sun, two atrocious shaped monsters could be seen in a close quarter fight against a group of witches. The witches were clearly in a disadvantageous position; their best abilities didn't seem to show any impact, no matter if it were vipers or fireballs they none were able to stop this enemy. When she came to the last picture, she saw that several witches had fallen, forming pools of blood.

Tilly frowned, the scene was undoubtedly drawn by a witch, only magic would be able to create such a lifelike image. But... in the end, were these merely simple pictures, or were they a reminiscent of something which had happened in the past?

With a feeling of being on a knife-edge, she immediately snatched the letter and quickly skimmed over its content.

Soon, Tilly felt her stomach tighten, and her hands began to shake as she saw one word appear in the letter again and again: 'Devil.'

"What happened," Ashes asked in concern, grasping Tilly's tight to support her, "What did the letter say?"

"It's the past of the Witch Cooperation Association," She patted the back of Ashes' hands, indicating that she was alright, "They

were looking for the Holy Mountain in the wilderness... You should remember the Holy Mountain, right?”

“Yeah, it’s the legendary destination of all witches. At the Holy Mountain, they can find real peace and serenity, but this is merely a vague rumor, there’s nothing genuine about it.” Ashes couldn’t accept it as correct, “Here on Sleeping Island, we can also live in peace, moreover, the demon bite is nothing more than a lie of the Church.”

“But Cara was convinced that the Holy Mountain did indeed exist. In addition, she had also found an ancient book within the ruins inside a forest of the Eastern Region, fully believing that it could lead her to the gate of an uninhabited land in the forbidden area. She went so far as to lead the Witch Cooperation Association over the Impassable Mountain range. However, after entering the wilderness, they didn’t discover the Holy Mountain, but instead met with a terrible monster.” Tilly said in a small voice.

“The one from the painting?” Ashes gasped.

“That’s right,” Tilly confirmed, showing a somewhat dark expression. “The letter said, that they possess extraordinary strength, moved nimbly and can control demonic beasts. One of them could even release lightning from its hand... Just like a witch. From the more than forty witches in the beginning, only six people survived. Then in their desperate situation, they decided to rely on the help of the Lord of Border Town.”

“Unexpectedly it was originally... like this.”

“Furthermore, the point that puzzles me the most is that the ancient book contained one paragraph which looked like a slovenly written essay, however it was written in the language of the Four Kingdoms.” Tilly turned her attention back to the letter, “Within, it mentions the Holy City, a fight with the Devils, and Alice’s experiments of a God’s Punishment Army. It should be the story of what happened four hundred years ago, but since they know the language of the Four Kingdoms, why should they use a very different language to record the documents and books?”

As she was still unable to get any results after thinking about it for a long time, the 5th Princess just put all these things aside and instead took out Sylvie’s letter, intending to learn what the examination of the Lord of Border Town has shown.

In the end, the first sentence of the letter had already left her dumbstruck, even more so than the shock when she had seen the word ‘Devil’.

“Lady Tilly, I was unable to find any sign of camouflage or magic on Roland Wimbledon’s body. Also, besides the witches of the Witch Alliance, there are no other witches hidden in the town. So I think... he may be your genuine older brother.”

Chapter 286 - “Change”

Genuine older brother.

Genuine... older brother, how can this be?

Tilly held the letter in a startled fashion with both hands, her mind not able to focus in the least, all the thoughts in her mind were tumbling up and down like the tide.

Her father, King Wimbledon III had five children. Gerald, Timothy, and Garcia, due to their earlier birth, could be considered as the first circle. By the time Roland had been born, the previous youngest Garcia was already six years old and would naturally not take him along to play with her. By this reasoning, she and Roland should have formed another circle, but... this hadn't been the case.

Her brother was always yearning for their two elder brothers' approval, and tried to integrate into their circle, but the only result was that they would often bully him. In the end, this caused Roland's character to become twisted and irritable. Of course, he never dared to release his anger at Gerald or the others, and instead had come to vent his anger on her.

For example, he had once tried to persuade her to steal father's crown with him, and when he was met with rejection, he inevitable flew into a rage out of humiliation and began insulting her; it would sometimes even go so far that they exchanged blows. Later, when their father found out about this, Roland had been

taught a ferocious lesson. After this incident however, he restrained himself a lot, but his bad habit of threatening her in all different kinds of ways was still as strong as before.

At that time, she had still been unable to understand these matters; but in retrospection, Tilly only felt that it was rather ridiculous and... childish.

The year she became ten years old, she discovered some cut in half earthworms had been placed into her favorite shoes; it finally became unbearable for her, and so she finally decided to fight back. She called Roland to come over, and as he opened his mouth to threaten her once more, she directly threw one of those earthworms into it – ever since then, he'd never dared to provoke her again, and she in turn, had stopped talking to him.

After becoming an adult, Roland still hadn't changed. Instead, it had even become more severe. She often heard about his dandy deeds, and among the nobles, he was always referred as being violent, mean, and without any learning or skills. To sum it up, he was the worst image of a noble among all nobles. Except for his identity as a member of the royal family, he had nothing at all. Regarding this evaluation, Tilly fully agreed with it... Furthermore, she also knew, that the reason he had the outward appearance of being violent and irritable, was because he was doing everything to cover his greatest weakness – being timid and afraid.

However, can such a person unexpectedly stand up and side with us witches? Giving asylum to a group who are known as 'the Devil's minions', in the end even becoming an enemy of the

Church without any hesitation?

For a moment, Tilly didn't know what to say.

"Tilly, Tilly?" Only after Ashes had shaken her two times was she finally able to come back to herself.

"I'm all right; everything is just a little... hard to believe," she shook her head. "Sylvie said that the Lord of Border Town is very probably the real Roland Wimbledon and not a puppet controlled by a witch or replacement.

"Oh, that stupid one who tried to grope me in vain – Keke, that animal?" Ashes coughed twice, "After not meeting for a year, he truly changed astonishingly. Apart from his appearance and impression which were still almost the same, I felt like I met someone completely different."

"Can you speak a bit more clearly?"

Ashes crooked her head and thought for a long time before she found the right words, "I think... the biggest difference, was that he appeared to be cleaner."

"Clean?"

"No matter if it was his style of dressing... or the feeling he gave to other people. None of it resembled a noble. He didn't wear any ornament, no matter if it was gold or jewels there weren't any on

him.” Ashes recalled, “Even his clothes were all utterly of common style, they seemed to be relatively simple, without lace, added decoration or golden threads. If not for his hair color, which was too eye-catching, there was almost no difference between him or a commoner, and... yet, at the same time, he didn’t seem to be an ordinary person.”

“He resembled a nobleman?” Tilly asked.

“No, not like a nobleman,” Ashes curled her lips, “Those aristocrats are unclean. Not like a pool of stagnant water, but unclean like the muddy silt underneath the pool of stagnant water. As for him... I’m unable to come up with a precise description, in short, he let people feel good.”

“It’s quite difficult to believe that you can say something like this.”

“Uh, I merely want to answer your question seriously, nothing more.”

Tilly breathed out deeply, it seems that brother has changed quite a lot, but in the end, what might have led to his transformation? Or is it because of a reason he himself isn’t aware of; and thus, unconsciously caused him to change into such a different person?

The 5th Princes suddenly remembered the content of Roland’s first letter – “Therefore, I have to destroy the entire Church, and turn their statement that the witches are the Devil’s messenger

into dust. However, rescuing the people from their ignorance and stupidity will be a long and slow process. For this, I will need even more help from you.

“Concerning, what would lead to this decision, what caused me to no longer be as indifferent to everything as in the past, are all trivialities that can slowly be elaborated on when we have the time. The ability to express oneself in a letter is limited, so I won’t say any more than necessary.”

Perhaps only by meeting him in person will I be able to discover the real cause.

To regain her train of thought, Tilly turned her sight back to the letter.

The latter half reported on what Sylvie had seen and heard during her stay in Border Town.

Originally Roland had chosen her for the purpose of verifying the natural mineral resources in the North Slope Mine. However, in the end, they had instead discovered an enormous amount of God’s Stones of Retaliation – it turns out that the stones with the ability to suppress a witch’s ability, comes out of the ground; just like any other mineral. So, in conclusion, the New Holy City at Hermes must also be in control of such a vein, which allows the Church to continue to produce the God’s Stone of Retaliation.

Once again further down, she came across another piece of news which attracted her attention.

That he possessed a type of weapon which could release iron balls and arrowheads from an iron tube, which contained a great deal of power, and was accompanied by a deafening roar... Even though Maggie and Ashes had already mentioned this kind of thing, but it was the first time that she had ever seen such a detailed description. Sylvie had even attached a hand-painted diagram to the paragraph.

“Oh? As it turns out, that thing which caused my injuries looked the same,” Ashes, reading the letter by looking over Tilly’s shoulder, remarked. “Since we are allies now, you can ask him to send a large batch of weapons to Sleeping Island with your next letter, and tell him that we need them to guard against the Church. If he doesn’t want to... Humph, this ally might not be as reliable as you thought.”

“Being allies doesn’t mean that you won’t guard against each other at all,” Tilly said laughingly, “This weapon is clearly the foundation he used to build his home, so how could it be so quickly handed over to others? This kind of test would only destroy the trust we worked so hard to build – I also excluded Molly and Wind Reader from the list I gave him about our witches. And this winter, we will go and visit Border Town anyway. At that time, we will be able to speak from face-to-face, don’t you think that that would be a better time for it?”

“Well,” Ashes spread her arms out and said, “You have the final say in this.”

Tilly showed her a smile and then continued to read the letter.

When the line of sight turned to the last paragraph of the letter, she couldn't help but feel shocked once more.

Roland unexpectedly invented an undergarment which was used to wrap up the woman's chest, he even went so far as to present it to every grown-up woman in the Witch Alliance. This is simply too absurd! It is known to send personal clothes as a present, but only between lovers, how could he – hold on! Tilly suddenly remembered a story which had spread throughout King's City. Apparently, there was a time when Roland had presented some young noble ladies with skin-tight corsets; but among them there were some who had immediately thrown it back into his face, which later turned into a joke among the nobles for some time after.

This indeed sounds like something he could do!

Tilly suddenly felt tangled up; on one hand, this brought him more in line with the image she had in her memory; on the other hand, she now felt that it might not be so good to go and meet him.

In the end, should, or should I not go to meet him in Border Town this Winter? The 5th Princess thought to herself in distress.

Chapter 287 - Preparations For The Soap Factory

Western Territory, Border Town.

The amount of washing stones purchased from Silver City filled four ships, and had taken several days to unload.

Now that there were enough raw materials, the soap mass production plan was officially placed on the agenda.

The necessary buildings, like the factory and warehouse, had already been set up long ago — the soap factory was located beside the industrial park, next to steam engine factory No. 2, built in exactly the same style as the former. Since the roof, supporting beams, and planks for the walls were all made out of wood, and it had the same measurements as before, the task of wood cutting and transportation was placed in the hands of the witches, and the whole construction period ended up being very short.

Manufacturing soap needed a series of chemical reaction, washing stones, which was a natural soda, could be used for this. The other raw materials required were also very common, in addition to soda ash, he also needed an enormous amount of milk of lime and fat. After soaking the milk of lime, or to be more precise, the lime inside the water, it would settle down at the bottom of the cloudy water inside the receptacle. By mixing it with [sodium carbonate](#), it will react and produce caustic soda, and by adding fat in turn, it will react to produce high-level fatty acid and glycerol. While the former product was the soap, the latter was a critical raw material for explosives.

Prior to manufacturing perfumed soap, Roland had already tested this entire chemical reaction process in the castle backyard. The basic theory was the same, but if he wanted to expand from the small amount of trial production to start mass production, he still needed to develop a consistent industrial production process and norms. But what was even more important to him were the professional chemists needed to guide the manufacturing process.

This was the reason, he had called the chief alchemist into his office.

“Your Highness, you previously asked me to develop a sulfuric acid mass-production system, I believe that I finally found a feasible plan.” Kyle Sichi immediately shouted after he had opened the door. “However, it will demand we use a large amount of lead. We will also need a blacksmith who can to make a vessel from the lead. I heard that some of your witches could accurately cut metal, one of them made those lumps of steel which make those rumbling and banging noises; is it possible that I...”

“Of course, just give me a report with the shape and size of the vessel you require, and I will instruct the Witch Alliance to make it.” Roland impatiently waves with his hand, indicating that he should take a seat, “The reason I called you over today, wasn’t to question you about the acid production system. Instead, I want to discuss another task with you.”

“Your Highness, these days I’m really busy, I don’t have the time to do any other work,” Kyle said, shaking his head repeatedly, “The acid mass-production system is a tough challenge. I have to

finish at all costs.” He paused and then added, “and it is a daunting challenge. My disciples are also out of the question; all of them are aiding me in preparing this task, none of them can leave.”

“Rest assured, you won’t have to lose any time about it,” Roland said comfortably, he took a mouthful of tea before he continued, “It isn’t necessary that you transfer any of your beloved disciples to take over, simply sending over a few apprentices should be good enough.”

“What will be their task?”

“To make soap. More precisely, to make a cheap version of the perfumed soap which you can buy at the convention market. Which with the exception of its scent, provides the same function as the perfumed soap and can be used for bathing, washing clothes, as well as cleaning tableware.”

“Are you speaking about the [saponification](#) reaction mentioned in ‘Elementary Chemistry’?” Kyle asked while stroking his beard, “The one that uses the reaction of caustic soda and fat to produce alcohol and salt?”

I have to say, hearing standard chemistry terms come out of the mouth of an alchemist is a very strange feeling, especially since I am the one to come up with them, Roland thought while forcing himself to restrain his smile. Instead, he spoke with a deathly earnest expression, “That’s right, the saponification reaction, as has been written down within the ancient book. It was because of this foundation that I was able to produce perfumed soap.”

“In that case, what do you need me to do? If it is not very important, I suggest we shift the production to a later date. After all, even if your subjects are unable to take a shower for several days it won’t cause any problems, it should be good enough if they just soak their clothes, meal plates, and other such things directly in the river.”

“It’s crucial,” the Prince said slowly, stressing each word. “To say it more clearly, making soap is unimportant. However, it is the byproduct of the production process that I desperately need right now.”

“Do you mean the... alcohol?” Kyle couldn’t believe what he had heard.

“That’s right, exactly the alcohol, you may also call it glycerol.” Roland stated, “It is a very valuable raw material, whose importance is not inferior to the two acids.”

“Okay,” Kyle shrugged and said, “However, as I already have stated it, I don’t have the time to do it myself.”

Roland exhaled slightly; once more starting to learn how tiring it was to deal with the chief alchemist, “As long as you pick out several talented apprentices and demonstrate the process one time in front of them, it will already be enough. I will recruit some of my subjects to carry out the production process, however, in the end, none of them even understands a word about chemistry, so there have to be some people to check on every segment.

After pausing for a moment, the Prince continued to say, “You can also treat it as a never before practiced chemical test – if placed in the alchemic workshop, this process may mean the discovery of some new alchemic formulas, enough to earn an apprentice the title of an alchemist.”

Those last few words were probably what persuaded Kyle in the end, “If you say it like this, I’ll need an entire afternoon to teach the apprentice what they require.”

“Excellent,” Roland smiled. “You should also know that the most important thing about the process is ensuring that enough caustic soda is produced.” He wrote down the reaction formula on a piece of paper.

Before the invention of the syntactic alkali production, natural soda was the most important alkali raw material. The latter was mainly composed of sodium bicarbonate, which when heated would break down into sodium carbonate, carbon dioxide, and water. Because it was accessible in great amount and also quite simple to process, it was still in use even in modern times. “By decomposing the washing stones with heat, followed by dissolving them in water and afterward filtering the water, you can obtain a relatively pure solution of sodium carbonate solution.

“Followed by heating it together with milk of lime, you can get a sodium hydroxide solution, for which you should easily be able to come up with a purifying method for yourself,” Roland explained. ” To clarify, first distil, then mix, repeating these steps until the concentration is high enough. Then after it has cooled down, the

concentrated solution will have formed a huge amount of crystals.”

These were the details written in the “Elementary Chemistry”. Since those two alkalis had several nicknames (such as caustic soda, lye, soda ash, sodium hyposulfite, sodium thiosulfate, soda crystals, etc.), it was incredibly easy to get them mixed up; which made it an important subject of a knowledge test. The reason why he could still clearly remember it to this day was because he was initially required to know the textbook’s related content by heart.

“I understand,” the chief alchemist said, looking over the equation of the chemical reaction from start to finish. “But Your Highness, what’s to be done in regards with the fat?”

“I will arrange people who will send it to you.” Animal fat was an expensive resource during this era, however, during the previous seed collecting mission, his personal guard had brought back the seeds for olive trees from Fallen Dragon Ridge, which now gave Border Town a reliable source for vegetable oil. Even though there was currently only a small plantation at the castle backyard, but since Leaves had the ability to hasten ripening, harvesting a pile of fruits each day was no problem at all.

The extraction of olive oil was also very simple. When the fruit became ripe, they simply used physical strength to squeeze the oil out and afterward sieved it so as to filter out the flesh and seeds.

Finally, after a brief description of the requirements and necessary preparation for the soap and glycerol production, Roland permitted Kyle Sichi to leave the office.

From now on, when the soap factory started its production, Roland would obtain a steady stream of glycerol.

And with glycerin, he had finally made a big step towards getting real smoke-free gunpowder and powerful explosives.

Chapter 288 - Teacher And Disciple

Kyle Sichi passed through Border Town into the direction of the Redwater River.

By now, Border Town had become a flourishing place; it was hard to imagine that this place had started out as nothing more than an outpost used to detect the movements of the demonic beasts. The ground beneath his feet was grayish black and solid. Both sides of the street were lined with neatly arranged single-story houses, different to the residential building in the other district. These houses weren't used for a living; their interior was much more spacious than the other residences, and were somewhat similar to a small warehouse.

According to His Highness, these houses would be used as stores.

In front of the single-story houses was one deep gutter, which was covered with stone slates, it was like the boundary line for the black street. In addition to this, at intervals of one segment they had also planted a big tree at the roadside, sandwiched between two houses, the branches grew close to the center of the road. Not only did it offer protection from the sun and rain, but it also warmed the people's hearts and delighted their eyes.

Kyle had no choice but to say, that in the end, it was the regularity that gave him the greatest impression.

No matter if it were the buildings, roads, sewers or trees, they were all located at the right place according to a previous plan,

each was carefully selected for quality at a level not inferior to that of a Lord's flower garden. The experience of wandering through the streets of Border Town, was equal to wandering through the Duke's district of Redwater City – although the latter's buildings was more concentrated and were even larger than these, the harmonious arrangement of these ordinary and mediocre houses exude their own unique sense of beauty. This kind of feeling surpassed that of individual greatness, showing a higher level of grandeur since it was part of a whole.

Just like those chemistry formulas that are adjusted to a uniform system, he thought, this is a beauty brought forth by order.

Nowadays, Kyle had a lot of reputation in Border Town. The passersby who were coming and going all greeted him with a nod and respectfully addressed him as Sage. However, compared with the title of a Sage, he still preferred the title of the Master of Chemistry. It was just a pity that His Highness had made it clear, that he had to understand "Intermediate Chemistry", before he could receive this special glory.

Walking away from the central district, Kyle could see the Redwater River flowing along the western edge of Border Town. The laboratory that were situated at the riverside had already increased to four buildings, however because of their lack of workforce, the last two were temporarily idle.

Kyle was prepared to immediately call for his apprentice to complete His Highness' mission but was stopped by a soldier wearing the uniform of the First Army.

“Your Excellency Sichi, a sailboat arrived at the docks with more than fifty... civilians,” the soldiers said after giving a salute, “Due to the number of people being too large and because they also aren’t merchants, a squadron of the garrison decided to stop them at the docks. Among them there was one who said that he wanted to see you, he claimed to be an alchemist from Redwater City, named -”

“Chavez!” Kyle shouted, simultaneously grabbing the soldier’s shoulder, “Take me to see him!”

...

Together with the soldier he went over to the dock district, there he saw a familiar silhouette come into his view – Chavez had indeed arrived.

“Honored Mentor!” The moment the other side saw Kyle, Chavez immediately waved his hand to get his attention.

“These are the alchemists and the alchemy apprentices I have invited,” Kyle turned toward the garrison captain and explained the situation, “Have every person you’re holding come over, I will take them to the City Hall so that they can register.”

“Yes, Your esteemed Self. But please allow me to send a squad to escort them.”

“No harm.”

In reality, the so-called escort was dispatched to control and keep a close watch over them, to avoid someone separating from the group and sneaking into Border Town's central district. But this was also an established rule set in place by His Highness the Prince. Therefore, Kyle also didn't have any intention of interfering with it.

"Honored Teacher, in the end, what is going on? Why would they especially dispatch someone to look after the docks in an out-of-the-way Border Town like this?" Chavez walked over the moment he was released and started complaining, sounding somewhat unhappy, "Moreover they were even stricter than the guards protecting the city walls of a major city. They asked for my name, surname, and origin. Even when I attempted to change their mind with silver royals it proved entirely useless."

"Silver royals?" Kyle asked with interest, "How many?"

"Of course, just one," Chavez answered, looking somewhat perplexed.

"Ha ha ha," hearing his response, Kyle stroked his beard and started to chuckle, "It is only natural that it hadn't worked. You have to understand, their salary is already set at fifteen silver royals each month."

"Fif-fifteen?"

"Yes, compared to those city patrols who rely on the blackmail of

merchants and traveler to make a living, the living standard of the First Army is much more comfortable. But this is also the reason why extortion, looting or accepting bribes are so strictly prohibited. Once discovered, they will immediately be expelled from the army, and at the same time they will be put into the dungeon to await trial.” Although, Kyle wasn’t an official minister of the City Hall, as the temporary substitute for the Minister of Chemistry he had still attended several conferences. Thus, he came to have a precise understanding of these upper layers of policy.

“Don’t tell me that they are really able to restrain their hands?” Chavez asked slightly suspicious.

“There still exist some who are unable to control themselves, but all of them have been sent to the mine to serve out their sentence,” Kyle twitched his lips then asked, “Didn’t you noticed any unique aspects about Border Town when you arrived?”

“Uh... there were a lot,” the young alchemist scratched his head, “For example, along the river channel there were many people who were chopping wood and repairing a road. However, they were already so far away from Border Town, in the end, where does the road they are repairing lead to? Furthermore, what purpose do those iron towers along the river shore serve? Do they store drinking water?” He paused, “Oh, that’s right! Before our arrival at the pier... I actually saw an iron bridge which was still under construction! It wasn’t made out of wood or stone, I’m sure it was made out of iron!”

“Also, didn’t the bridge seem much longer than any you have ever seen in your life before?” Chief Alchemist asked smilingly.

“Therefore, since you’ve arrived here you shouldn’t keep hold of your life experience from Redwater City. This is an entirely different kind of city, of course... At present, it is only a town, but it is already amazing enough. It is the same with ‘Elementary Chemistry’, before you have seen it, you would never be able to believe that something like it would be ‘possible’.”

He didn’t know why, but as he said these words to his apprentice, he felt indescribably carefree and joyful within his heart. Unknowingly he had already come to regard himself as a citizen of Border Town, which meant he was only taking some pleasure in showing off his new home to a visitor.

...

After the completion of the registration, the City Hall’s officials arranged the residences for the apprentice, while Kyle Sichi immediately pulled Chavez along and returned to his house.

“Though I knew that you would accept my invitation, I still didn’t expect you to come so soon.”

“I...” Chaves looking somewhat embarrassed as he bowed and confessed, “I should have agreed from the beginning.”

Hearing this, the Chief Alchemist smiled. Even though he was engrossed in alchemy, but that didn’t mean he didn’t understand a word about the affairs of life. The reason why Chavez didn’t choose to leave from the beginning, was that due to his discovery of the two acids method, he had hoped that Redwater City’s Lord

would give him the position of the Chief Alchemist. Only after Kabora, who'd already held some prejudice towards him, became the new chief did he decide to leave Redwater City.

But Kyle didn't really care about such small matters, longing for the position of the chief alchemist of the workshop had always been the ultimate goal pursued by alchemists.

“Do not cherish your previous work, alchemy is meaningless here. All your past achievements in the field of alchemy are not even worth mentioning. In this place only one thing is worth pursuing: Chemistry.”

Chavez took a deep breath and then said, “I understand.”

“Even though you may get your own house assigned to you, but sleep here for tonight... since we haven't talked for a long time.”

Back when he had taught Chavez his alchemy skills, he had pulled his young disciple along and talked with him all through the night, and if they became too sleepy, they ended up squeezing into the same bed.

The other party apparently understood his meaning and immediately answered in an excited tone, “yes, mentor!”

After eating dinner, the two went to the study, where Kyle Sichi carefully handed Chavez the “Elementary Chemistry”.

“Is this the praised ancient book?”

Chavez solemnly opened the first page and earnestly started to read. Kyle stood to the side, he was there in case Chavez came across some points he couldn't understand. Looking at this scene, it seemed as if they had stepped back some years, the other party was being taught by him once again.

Now with the addition of Chavez and the fifty new apprentices, I finally have more than enough people to test the large-scale production of sulfuric acid, while at the same time, the other two laboratories can also begin their work. But the most important part of this is that I have fulfilled His Highness' task, and now it's now up to him to fulfill his promise and to give me the book on “Intermediate Chemistry”, Kyle proudly thought.

Chapter 289 - West Of The Western Border

Lightning, in charge of her own “adventure equipment”, checked it over once more.

Flint and tinder, bandages, daggers, maps, as well as a bag full of rations stuffed with dried beef.

“What about you?” She looked at Maggie, “Check it again.”

“Goo!”

Maggie put her hand into her bag – this cloth was usually hidden in her fluffy hair, in the end, it was hard to determine just how many things she could actually put into it. Since the moment she turned into a bird, all her clothes and bags seemed to disappear without a trace. Even though Lightning’s ability to fly was restricted by a weight limit, Maggie, however, didn’t seem to be affected in the least. The best proof of this was that she pulled far more out of her bag than Lightning.

Jerky, shredded dried pork, drumsticks, fish, eggs, all were piled up in front of Lightning.

“Oh, my God,” Lightning shouted in disbelief, “We are going on an adventure, and not on a barbecue in the wilderness. At least take some weapons along with you.”

“Googoo!” Macey pointed at her mouth.

“Do you want to say that your beak is your weapon?” Lightning sighed, “If you encounter a judge dressed like a can, it’d be a wonder if you could ever peck open his armor! Hey, forget it!... It’s only a one-day trip anyway, we shouldn’t encounter any danger, so let’s get started.”

“I see! Goo!” Maggie immediately turned into a pigeon, ran two steps, and started flying close above the ground before slowly rising.

Uh, maybe the weight did have an impact on her.

Lightning pulled her windproof glasses down, gently leaped into the air and then flew to the front.

I can still clearly remember when I had seen Maggie for the first time. It was just south of here, in the woods that we started our air chase. Even though she couldn’t escape my hands in the end, but I still had to spend a lot of effort before I was able to jump on her. Nowadays, I’m afraid I would be able to catch her in the blink of an eye.

This cannot go on, it’s already so rare to find a partner to fly. In the future, I have to bear the responsibility for the adventure equipment alone, the little girl thought, but it does seem she is in need of a good exercise.

“Goo, goo?”

Lightning reduced her speed and flew over to Maggie's side, "Alright let's speak!"

"I want to ask, what area are we going to explore, goo?" The pigeon's mouth opened and closed repeatedly.

"The western end of the Concealing Forest. I want to see how big the forest actually is in the end," Lightning said, she pulled out a map from her bag and spread it out in front of them. Pointing at a blank space on the western side and said, "We will also be able to fill out this missing piece as we pass by, and maybe we can also see where the Redwater River comes from."

When Maggie had returned from her mission to the Fjords, Lightning immediately began preparing for the expedition. Whenever they had free practice, His Highness never cared where they flew off to. Furthermore, the little girl also had a secret in her heart which she couldn't tell her counterpart – she was afraid of exploring the forest alone.

This was simply an extraordinary shame and humiliation for an explorer.

But she could not deceive herself, ever since her trip to the stone tower she had developed a fear of the deep forest. At the thought that the horrible monster might be hidden in the woods, she could not help but want to escape as quickly as possible.

Fortunately, she was still the daughter of the greatest explorer.

Thunder had once mentioned to her a method of overcoming fear. Which was by approaching it a bit, then observe it, and coming to understand it, ultimately, you will discover that your “fear” is not so terrible.

Because the roots of these obstacles are all planted in your own heart.

This time the adventure was exactly Lightning’s attempt to get rid of her fear and together with Maggie as a companion, she felt that at least her heart was a little more emboldened. The route she chose was also very secure, flying westwards along the Redwater River, never going deep into the forest, which she presumed would make it very unlikely for her to encounter any Devils. After they’ve taken the route once, Lightning would try it alone next time. She totally believed that one day, she would be able to go out alone to draw a complete map of the Western Territory, visit the stone tower again, and also uncover the truth about the Holy City Taqila.

...

All along the road, Lightning contained their speed at around sixty kilometers per hour. Nowadays, she was already fully able to accurately control her speed through the amount of magic power she released. And according to the current consumption, she could continue to fly all day.

Also, flying along the river and only at the edge of the forest made it a lot more relaxed compared to the last search for the stone

tower. At that time, her entire field of vision had been filled with dark green, giving off a gloomy and depressed feeling and making it impossible for her to distinguish direction and height. Today however, under the waves of bright sunlight, the Redwater River has turned into crystalline silver belt, coupled with Maggie's constant chatter in her ear, Lightning's fear was quickly fading.

“Quick, look, there are mountains in front, goo!”

At last, Lightning also saw the incomparable Mountain – even though it was still far away, its dusky body already showed its majestic appearance. The mountain peak was next to the ocean, as if the land had crept over to the water. The closer they came to the Redwater River, the more the hills close to the river's waters rapidly shrank away, until they finally became one with the silver belt.

“This mountain is just a bit too big,” she could not help but sigh in sorrow, with the shortening of the distance, the contours of the mountain also became increasingly evident. Its peak was snow white, appearing to go straight into the clouds. Even though it wasn't like the Impassable Mountain range which with its ups and downs went on for thousands of miles, but regarding height, it was even higher than three to four mountains put together. The hillside south of it was only one extending part of its mountain ridges, the source of the Redwater River also came from this magnificent high mountain.

“It's the end of the Concealing Forest!” Maggie screamed excitedly.

Just like Maggie had said, the piece of dark green finally came to an end under their feet, the earth was also restored to a light green – which should be a slice of grassland. Further ahead however, at the edge of their line of sight, it unexpectedly changed into a pitch-black which covered the whole area up till the foot of the mountain.

“Let’s go down and take a look,” Lightning shouted, and pointed down before she dived towards the dark earth. She quickly discovered that the ground was entirely formed out of black stone.

“What is this?” After landing, Maggie immediately pecked twice at it, “It looks like it isn’t something to eat, goo!”

“Of course, you cannot eat it,” Lightning said and picked up a black stone to take a closer look. It had a sharp and clear-cut look, and even though it had a pitch-black outward appearance, Lightning could still see a metallic sheen when she turned it in the sun. And this kind of stone was everywhere, together with a few patches of mud. At first glance, it looked like the earth has been soaked in ink. “It might be some kind of ore, take two pieces along and we’ll let His Highness take a look.”

It was then time for drawing work, so she returned to the air and began to record the terrain in the vicinity.

It had taken them almost half the morning to arrive from the edge of Border Town to the foot of the mountain. In other words, this place was close to two hundred and forty kilometers away from Border Town; much further than Longsong Stronghold. And this mountain... Within Lightning’s mind an idea suddenly

emerged, with such a gigantic mountain, how would the scenery look like? Is it a vast jungle, or undulating hills and mountains?

After her fear disappeared, it became hard for her to suppress this idea once it had appeared.

Crossing the mountains would obviously be somewhat challenging, just the peak covered in white snow was enough to make people shrink back. But, there was also one other route, bypass it by sea. By doing this, she wouldn't even need to fly to the back of the mountain, she would only need to travel onwards to the middle of the sea, and she could put the rear of the mountain in her line of sight.

Lightning called Maggie over, then repeatedly warned her not to move about randomly. She put on her windproof glasses and raised her speed to the limit the next instant – her magic power quickly drained, and the oncoming wind swept her short hair to the back of her head, the land beneath her continually receded, and the blue ocean filled her entire field of vision.

After about half an hour's flight, she was finally able to faintly see the scene behind the mountain. Behind it, it seemed that there was a succession of mountains that separated the sea from the land, but then, Lightning saw something which made her blood freeze inside of her veins.

At the end of the horizon, there was a layer of reddish-brown fog which covered the mountains, looking just like blood. The fog extended all along to the west, making it almost impossible for her to see its boundary.

Chapter 290 - Investigation Plan

While Roland was sitting at his desk, in the middle of pondering how to attack the imperial palace from the air, a pounding sound suddenly came from the french window at his back.

Looking back, he saw Lightning pressing against the window, her face stricken with panic. While Maggie, squatting on her head, was quickly pecking at the window.

The moment Nightingale opened the window, the little girl immediately flew into Roland's arms.

"What happened," Roland asked confused, "What made you become like this?"

"A black stone, goo! An enormous snow-capped mountain, goo!" Maggie dropped on the table, wildly flapping her wings as she reported.

"What?"

"No, that's not all," Lightning corrected with a muffled voice, "The Devils. I saw the Devils!"

"What?" Roland's expression turned serious, he stroked her head, trying to give her some emotional support, "Don't panic, just explain it to me slowly."

After a while, Lightning freed her head from the Prince's embrace and looked at his face. Her golden-bright hair looked like a complete mess, and around her eyes were two circles, which formed light red mark. Apparently, she had forgotten to put on her wind protector in her panic to flee at high-speed, "I wanted to draw the border of the Concealing Forest, so we flew westward along the Redwater River, at its end, we found a mountain..."

After listening to the narration of the details of what she had seen and heard, Roland couldn't help but to stare with big eyes into the empty air. The snow-capped mountain with the red mist that those Devils need to survive lays to the west, at our back, and it is only two hundred kilometers away from here?

He looked at Nightingale, who nodded and said, "I'll call the other sisters."

Soon after, the witches came together for an emergency meeting in the castle office.

After Roland told them what Lightning had discovered, the witches who had experienced that one night of slaughter all exposed the same disturbed expression. Especially Leaves, who had killed the two Devils with her own hands, could not help but cover her mouth and cry out in a small voice.

"Your Highness, I recommend we scout out the land covered in red mist further," Scroll was the first to speak, "After all, Lightning was only able to take a short glance from very far away, thus we cannot be certain that the Devils indeed live under the red mist. Also, it is necessary to investigate whether they will cross the

mountain range that's next to the ocean and travel along the coastline to reach the mainland."

"I agree with Scroll's standpoint," Wendy answered and nodded in agreement. "Although they are very powerful, it is always better to prepare to defend, than have your hands tied and wait to be captured."

As the two oldest witches of the Witch Union, Scroll and Wendy had always been the pillar of many sister's hearts. Thus, even though some of them still showed some sign of fear, none of them seemed like they only wanted to sit still and wait for their death.

Roland preferred this kind of response, and he could see that no one was expressing any objections, the basic plan was already set like this. The crucial point now was to decide how they would implement it.

"We could use a hot air balloon for the investigation," Anna suggested. "The cloud gazer is already covered with a sky camouflage, so we can use clouds as cover and fly over the ocean."

"In addition, you can also take Sylvie along," Nightingale stated. "Her ability is perfect to deal with this kind of situation."

"Right," Rolland nodded, "Furthermore... I will also be going."

"Your Highness!" The second the words had left his mouth, the three, Wendy, Scroll, and Nightingale shouted at the same time to

stop him, “You can’t take this risk yourself!

“It’s not that I will be taking any risks,” Roland waved his hands to calm them down before explaining further, “If they had the ability to pass over the high mountain or the sea, they would already have spread all over the Four Kingdoms by now. However, the reason why they are still gathered in the land to the Far West is simply because they are not as fearful as in your imagination.”

Still, there was another reason he hadn’t mentioned, in regards to judging the level of development of a differed kind of civilization, he was far more experienced than any of them – if he could lay his eyes on the Devils and their city, it would be a great help in developing the path to follow in the future and also to come up with a tactic to repulse the enemy.

“But...” Wendy’s face was still filled with hesitation.

“Do not worry, we will just take a look from a distance,” the Prince said and showed a reassuring smile, “In case I came to the conclusion that a distant investigation was dangerous, I would never permit you to go.”

“Alright, but you have to take me along with you,” as she saw that their attempt to dissuade him was in vain, Nightingale was the first to change her tact.

Seeing his counterpart’s serious gaze as she declared her demands, Roland knew that it was impossible for him to reject her. So, after thinking about it for a moment, he announced: “In that

case, the people who will come along on this trip besides me, are Anna, Wendy, Soraya, Sylvie, Nightingale, Lightning, and Maggie.

“The mission will be in one week. In addition to the necessary food reserves, I also will give each of you a revolver. Use the week to practice, so that even if you are a non-combat witch, you will still be able to fight back if you are facing an enemy.”

Since the hot air balloon’s speed of flight was far less than Lightning’s, Roland feared that they would need a whole day to travel a distance of more than 200 kilometers. They would therefore have to camp one night in the wilderness if they wanted to complete the investigation. Taking this into account, dry food, tents, and weapons were a must.

“Yes, Your Highness,” the witches said in chorus.

After the crowd had departed, Roland finally had time to look at the black stone that Lightning had brought back under such great effort.

“You said that this kind of stone was everywhere at the edge of the forest?”

“Yes,” by now Lightning had calmed down, but even while sitting at the mahogany table, her legs were still swaying, the red flush on her cheeks also had not faded. “Furthermore, the nearer to the foot of the mountain the larger the more black stones there are. Looking at it from high up, the area covered by these black stones is more than a dozen times bigger than Border Town.”

When Roland picked it up to estimate its weight, his heart jumped slightly.

With regards to its weight, it is much lighter than an ordinary stone, which makes it unlikely that it's ore. Its external appearance is hard and lithe, and under the sunlight, it reflects with a metallic luster. Furthermore, it lays bare on the surface... Is it possible that this could be a coal mine?

Thinking of this, he quickly called Anna back.

As it burned down under her black flame, the black stone soon became bright red, looking just like an iron ore in the smelting furnace, but it soon began to dissolve. Even after Anna had taken her black flame back, the orange light exuded by the stone didn't weaken in the slightest degree. Instead, they could even see how a blue flame was slightly rising from its surface.

With this, Roland had confirmed his guess that it was indeed a piece of anthracite with excellent quality.

"So, this is the original look of a coal mine," Lighting said in surprise. "I always thought it would resemble fragile charcoal and be covered with dust, so that if you touched it with your hand, it would make your palm dirty."

"Of course, only after going through a crushing and dilution process will it look like charcoal briquette and [coal cake](#)," Roland explained laughingly. "Most of the extraction that comes out of a

coal mine look like stones in general, and of course, the higher the quality of the raw coal, the stronger will its structure be. In the end, they will become just like these stones, showing a reflecting luster on their surface.”

This unexpected discovery made him exceptionally happy.

Coal wasn't a rarity in the Kingdom of Graycastle. Both Fallen Dragon Ridge and Silver City had coal mines, their yield was mostly used to fuel kilns or personal heating. But in fact, its range of use was extremely broad. Before the extensive spread of the internal combustion engine, the smoke of burning coal had covered about half the sky. While using it for coal coking, it could replace charcoal for smelting iron into steel and would be much more environmental friendly than wantonly cutting down trees. Even after humanity had entered the electrical era, coal could still be refined into coal gas, hydrogen, and asphalt. Or it could be used to generate electricity. It was thus regarded as a cheap fuel of high quality.

Holding an open coal mine in hand was clearly much better than relying on imports. The only question was, how to exploit it?

Roland moved his gaze to Lightning's newly drawn map.

It seemed that the construction of steam driven cement boat was imperative.

Chapter 291 - Advance Notice

Within the Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Graycastle, Timothy was tightly grasping his scepter, while he looked at the Chief Alchemist Rayleigh Kenneth standing within the audience, showing such a pleased expression.

“Were you able to get a clue about the alchemy recipe taken by the deserters?”

“Sure! Your honored Majesty, this is the latest snow powder developed by the Alchemy Association. Please permit me to demonstrate it now.” Rayleigh said with a deep bow.

After receiving the new King’s approval, he waved in the direction of the crowd behind him, two disciples holding a bag in their hands immediately stepping forward. He spread two sheets of white paper over the ground, and poured out the snow powder within the bags on top, forming two separate lines. One of them was ash gray, while the other was much darker, being almost ashy black.

“Your Majesty, please take a look. The lighter one is the snow powder originally used during celebrations, while the darker one is the latest development, the fast igniting snow powder.” Rayleigh took out a flint, ignited the powder on top of the papers. The light snow powder merely began to burn slowly and emitted thick billowing smoke, while the dark colored one burned all the powder in one breath and also spread over to the white paper below.

“What does that mean?” Timothy asked with a deep frown, “The toy that my dear sister got, didn’t only burn a piece of paper!”

“Of course not, Your honored Majesty,” Rayleigh said, as a big smile began to spread over his whole face, “I do not know if you had noticed the amount of smoke it released when I ignited it. The faster the snow powder burns, the more smoke is released in a short period of time, and this is the cause of its extreme power. I will prove this with another experiment.”

This time it were two fist-sized parchment bags, which were wrapped up tightly. Each of the disciples ignited a thin rope which was put into the paper bag then covered each with a copper bowl. The sparks moved along the rope, gradually crawling into the copper bowls.

“Attention, Your Majesty, this time the sound will be louder, so please cover your ears.”

The chief alchemist’s voice had just faded as a loud bang ringed out. One copper bowl flipped upside down, while the other actually flew straight towards the ceiling, after falling back to the floor it still bounced several times on the granite slate, issuing a crisp sound every time.

Damn it! Timothy unconsciously swallowed, he had nearly let go of his scepter. Why didn’t this old fool mention it earlier!

One of the disciples gathered the second bowl and placed it back in front of the new King, whereas he suppressed his fury to the

bottom of his heart and focused his attention on those bowls. This man was still the Chief Alchemist of King's City Alchemy Workshop, if he wanted to study the new alchemic weapon, he couldn't do so without his help.

At this moment, it became apparent that it had changed its form, it just looked as if someone had resolutely hit it on the inside of the bowl with a hammer, deforming the rim of the bowl.

"I have repeatedly verified that the power of the snow powder doesn't lie in its burning, but in this gas. This is also the truth hidden in the receipt the deserters had stolen." Rayleigh stood in the middle of the hall and spoke frankly with assurance, "If you increase the amount of snow powder, and tightly compress it into a ball, it will become powerful enough to break armor and tear bodies apart. I believe that sooner or later, this new type of snow powder will inevitably replace swords and arrows. Even if they are well-trained knights, they won't be a match for a civilian equipped with these bags of snow powder."

This sentence caused a great outburst from within the crowd. Many of Timothy's Knights faces gathered within the hall showed gloomy expressions. Even Knight Steelheart Weimar looked as if wanted to step forward and argue with the alchemist, so Timothy quickly knocked with his scepter against the floor and shouted, "Quiet!"

After the crowd bowed in unison, Timothy turned his gaze back to Rayleigh. "Is your formula exactly the same as the recipe the deserters took away?"

“No, Your Majesty,” Rayleigh shook his head, and then put a lot of disdain in his words, “Although saltpeter is one of the Alchemic Workshops stock items, however, the stock won’t be too big usually. At the time of mixing the snow powder, he just happened to find this formula. Even if he wanted to run more test, the amount of saltpeter wasn’t enough to use it several times. However, the formula for my fast igniting snow powder was developed after going through a large number of test. It is the optimal method and its power is much greater than a product produced by chance.”

“That’s good to know,” Timothy said in a relaxed voice. Although he had known that Garcia had arranged many of her people within all ranks, but he had never thought that she even had some henchmen within the Alchemy Association. The scheme of the deserters was well planned, and at the time he fled he had taken a dozen apprentices along. Usually something like this wouldn’t be a big deal, after all, even though alchemists were relatively rare in other cities, King’s City had more than twenty of them. So, if one had left its impact would normally be something insignificant, but this time the man had discovered a new highly lethal kind of snow powder before leaving. And instead of contributing it towards the Alchemic Workshop, he had left without a trace the very next day.

In the end, Timothy’s spies were only able to capture some of the remaining confidants but failed to intercept the entire group of deserters. The moment he learned about the news, Timothy immediately ordered his Imperial Prime Minister to purchase all of the saltpeter capacities within the city and requested the Alchemic Workshop to reproduce the deserts’ snow powder formula as soon as possible. And today, after waiting for two months, they finally showed some results, which made him feel quite satisfied. Even if

this man's respect for him was a bit lacking, he was still pleasing to his eye at this moment.

After settling his thoughts, Timothy cleared his throat and said, "You did well. For your contribution, I will grant you twenty-five gold royals as reward. Additionally, I will also open a snow powder workshop in King's City's inner city, which will be responsible for the mass production of the fast igniting snow powder. However, you cannot become lax and have to further study its usage. If it actually turns out like you said, that civilians would become able to defeat knights, rewarding you with a title and territory won't be a problem."

"Thank you very much, Your Majesty!"

After the chief alchemist had left the hall, Sir Weimar, no longer able to hold himself back, stood up and said, "Your Majesty, even though this stuff looked a bit scary, but wanting to use it to defeat a knight, is absolutely not possible. As you can see, it needs to be ignited to trigger, its killing range is also only half a step or so. At that distance, against a civilian, I have dozens of ways to instantly send them to the ground. Even granted that they are able to use it at a close distance, I can still take advantage of the ignition time to strike and kill my opponent, before calmly leaving. According to Rayleigh's way of speaking, it is clear that he had never been to the battlefield."

"We also think the same, Your Majesty," other knights followed up.

"That's why I let him continue to search for a better way,"

Timothy said, “For example, by shortening the ignition time or making it throwable, and so forth. Of course, no matter what kind of weapon they use, I’m also convinced that a Knight will be better than a farmer.”

Although he spoke like this, within his heart, he also had some traces of disagreement. Civilians indeed completely lacked any usage, they were cowardly and ignorant, and also afraid of dying. But if controlled by pills and equipped with snow powder, they could become a powerful weapon. At least that was if they had needed to storm a city gate or a shield wall, they would only have to send out a few militia holding snow powder, and it would be enough to tear a hole in a solid line of defense.

At this moment, some footsteps could suddenly be heard coming from beyond doors, soon followed by an anxious personal guard who came running into the hall, and fell onto his knees and announced. “Your Majesty, it seems that the militia team you had sent to the Western Territory got attacked, and now the defeated soldiers have come back to King’s City. I even heard that they brought back a letter of reprimand, by now many people have heard about it.”

“What?” Timothy’s eyes became wide, “Make sure that they keep their mouth shut and bring all who are still alive to me here in the castle!”

...

In the castle courtyard, a ragged militia group could be seen kneeling on the ground and pleading, “Your Majesty be merciful,

please give us some pills, we cannot stand it any longer.”

You group of wastes, in addition to consuming the enemy, there is basically nothing else you can be used for. Since you are alive, you’re already wasting food, and now you even dare to ask me for pills?

Timothy looked with cold eyes at the group of people and said in a low voice: “In the end, how was it possible for the enemy to defeat you? Who can tell me something about the course of the battle? Whoever can give me a clear answer, will receive the antidote.”

All the people suddenly began to speak at the same time, “We were attacked while we were still on board, which turned the fleet into chaos. The Lead Knight gave the command to go ashore and get in order. However, the moment we landed we were attacked by unending crossbow bolts, so dense that we didn’t even get the chance to fight back. It was the Knights who took the lead and surrendered, we merely followed them and... kneeled.”

“What about the group of Knights and the Lead Knight?”

“No... I don’t know. They escorted us back to the camp, but we didn’t see any Knight.”

Timothy frowned and his voice became even colder, “How were you able to come back?”

“It was Prince Roland who let us go,” one of them said hurriedly. “Also, he gave us a letter that we are supposed to pass on to you.”

“To all of you?”

“That’s right, I also have one!”

“Your majesty, I also have a letter!”

The group of people shouted at once and stood up, pulling Roland’s “letter” out of their pockets.

To hell with it! He actually gave it to everyone? Timothy gathered the letters only to discover that they all contained the same message.

“Your stupid act makes me feel sorry for you, Timothy Wimbledon. The repeated invasion of the Western Territory was a grave mistake for which you will have to pay the price. I will attack King’s City at the beginning of the second month of autumn, I will make you learn that your place is far from being as secure as you imagine. When the day comes, all of King’s City’s people will see, your kingship is already on the verge of collapse.

“- Roland Wimbledon.”

Chapter 292 - Precision Guided Bombs

The place where they would be practicing shooting their pistols was arranged at the castle's front courtyard.

Including Sylvie, all of the witches selected for the investigation team had received a revolver.

Roland spent two days to let everyone become familiar with and master the posture needed to shoot a gun, before they switched over to shoot with live ammunition. The major part of the training was divided into aiming while shooting from ten meters and paced shooting from five meters distance so that they could cope with a surprise attack or an open attack of the enemy.

During the posture training, most of the witches were still able to imitate the pattern, but the moment they fired their first shot the truth was soon revealed.

Especially when the deafening sound of gunfire split the air, for most of them, their first reaction was to block their ears, turning the observing Nightingale's brows straight.

Except for Anna.

Whenever he looked at her, both her hands seemed to remain motionless even as she continuously pulled the trigger, completely disregarding the gunfire and smoke. Regardless of the accuracy of her aim, just this posture alone was already absolutely efficient.

Can it be, in addition to learning new knowledge, Anna is just as highly talented in other areas? Roland thought to himself, secretly surprised, even though these are black gunpowder bullets, this is still a large caliber revolver with a strong recoil. So how it is possible for her arms to remain so stable, and how is she able to shoot continuously?

Stepping behind her, full of curiosity, he saw two black flames sticking against the handle of the gun and holding it firmly in the air, while Anna was only keeping a virtual grasping position not even touching the real revolver. After he pat her on the shoulders, he saw her taking out two black flames from her ears as she turned around. She gave him a 'come and praise me' expression and said, "How about it? I always hit the target!"

Roland didn't know whether he should laugh or cry. But since he didn't have any better options he loudly declared: "Everyone, no one is allowed to use their ability to assist you with the practice!"

"Eh, why?"

"So that you won't get flustered, in case you meet an enemy carrying a God's Stone of Retaliation," Rolland explained. He sighed and reached with his hands to help plug Anna's ears. "Like this, you won't be afraid, alright?"

"Yes," Anna's eyes were brimming with happiness. She turned around, changed the bullets, lifted the gun and aimed.

“Maggie quickly come over here, I also need someone to block my ears,” Lightning shouted, full of envy.

“Goo?” The latter pointed at herself, the gun still in her hands.

“You cannot shoot the gun after turning into a bird anyway,” the little girl said with a wink, “You help me first, and I’ll help you cover your ears later.”

“Goo!”

The other witches in the castle were also attracted by the successive sounds of gunfire, gradually, they all gathered at the castle’s front courtyard. Many of them looking eager to also have a go. At the end of the day, almost everyone had come up to experience how to use a revolver for themselves.

Roland’s heart was deeply moved as he looked upon this diverse group of women all in high spirit as they fired the weapons they were holding.

Even now, he could still remember the appearance of each witch when he met them for the first time.

Previously, Anna’s hands and feet were thin and weak, just like bamboo poles, her eyes had lost all signs of life, and always had a monotonous expression.

The area between Nightingale’s eyebrows always contained

traces of stormy clouds. Her smiling expression also had nothing to do with her mood; in other words, its only use was to cover the true state of her mind, so there was always a false smile which was hanging at the corner of her lips.

And Wendy, usually speaking in a low voice, was unable to conceal her exhaustion. Leaves, someone who had thrown away all thoughts of a healthy future and accepted all the misfortunes decreed upon her by fate; and Lily, like a cat, ever on guard.

Furthermore, there was Lightning, Mystery moon, Hummingbird, Scroll, and so on...

After experiencing being oppressed, being framed, and being hunted, they were already lucky to be able to survive. As for where they were supposed to go. They absolutely had no time to ponder over that. Nowadays however, they were already completely differently from how they'd been in the past.

The witches were now emitting a unique charm, their eyes were flashing with rays of intelligence. They no longer seemed unsure about their fate – in addition to being able to live, they now had some effort to spare pursuing some other things, something that was just as beautiful as life itself.

And whenever he came face to face with one of the witches, their eyes would be filled with gratefulness and trust, making Roland's heart feel as if it was filled with strength.

...

After lunch, and in the afternoon, it was time for the specially developed high-altitude throwing exercise in preparation for the “Autumn offensive”. The number of witches participating in the exercise had been reduced to half, leaving only Anna, Wendy and Lightning.

This was also the minimum amount of people required to complete the air raid.

Setting the attack time at the beginning of the second month of autumn was what he came up with after some careful deliberations. If the time was too short, they would be unable to carry out the mission safely; and if they took too long, Roland feared they wouldn’t be able to stop Timothy from attacking again. As long as he decided to launch a large-scale attack on the Western Region and forcefully fed the recruited civilians with the pills, the air raid wouldn’t be able to achieve its desired effect.

Therefore, the autumn offensive had to be completed before Timothy could complete the recruitment.

To realize his “promise”, Roland planned to drop a 250-kilogram bomb at the top of the castle. That bomb, which was about five times Nightingales’ weight, would be dropped from a height of two kilometers, directly smash through the dome of the palace, then detonate inside.

As the hot air balloon slowly lifted off, it also took a basket that was transporting a solid imitation of the bomb into the sky – as

Roland was riding in the basket, the solid iron projectile was a number smaller, probably only around four times Nightingales' weight. However, its shape was completely the same as the aviation bomb they would be using in the future. It had a streamlined form, with a thin front and a thick rear, together with stable tail wings and a speed reducing parasol. It would ensure that it remained perpendicular to the ground, and that it would control its maximum speed.

The basket they would throw the bomb from had been especially remodeled. They set up an iron trestle so that the projectile could stand upright in the middle of the basket with one-half of it hanging out of the bottom. So as long as someone pulled the valve, the hook would loosen and the bomb would separate from the basket to fall straight down.

With the rising height, Border Town soon became as large as a fingernail, while the Redwater River had turned into a bright silver band.

"This is the first time I've been at such a high place," Wendy said, as she looked out of the observation window. "It seems as if the whole Western Territory has become small."

"That's because it is indeed very small," Roland said, and lightly chuckled. "Look at the wilderness in the North, that's the place where we should be going to later."

"Do you want to go even higher? I already can't see the target," Lightning shouted from outside the basket.

“It is more or less right,” he nodded toward Anna, then gave the little girl the ready signal.

Although it was impossible to determine how far away they were from the ground in the end, it was more than a thousand meter – this was an attack altitude that could be described as being entirely safe, while the enemy would also be unable to see the hot air balloon.

However, a distance of more than a thousand meters of empty air meant that the place the projectile hit in the end would depend entirely on fate. If they wanted to hit the target accurately, the bomb needed to have a guidance system.

And it was the little girl, Lightning, who would take over this task.

“Release the bomb,” Roland commanded.

Wendy pulled a valve, the bomb was released and a stream of wind immediately came pouring into the basket. Anna used the cover plate, which had long since been prepared, to seal the dropping hole, then tightened the handle – they had repeatedly practiced this processes while they were on land, which meant that the two women were already very familiar with it.

“Can she hit the target?” Wendy asked while looking through the window.

“We will only know the answer after landing,” Roland said and shrugged.

As the bomb fell, Lightning would drop at the same speed as the bomb while applying a horizontal force against it. In this way she could freely change its trajectory and turn it into a guided missile. By the time it closed in on the target, Lightning would pull on the mechanism at the tail end to separate the parachute from the missile. At the last hundreds meters, the bomb should then gather enough kinetic energy to break through the palace roof.

As a result, the height of the drop-off would be sufficient while the precise control on hitting the impact point would also be guaranteed.

All they now had to do was unceasingly keep on practicing this routine, nothing more.

Chapter 293 - The Night Before

The week quickly passed, and now it was finally time for the investigation team to set out on their journey.

Roland called Barov, Carter, and Iron Axe over to the castle and informed them that he would be leaving Border Town for two days. During his departure, they were to continue carrying out the affairs of the town in accordance with the general plans and regulation.

Of course, his declaration was met with unanimous opposition from the three of them. Carter wanted to perform his duty as the Chief Knight and stand guard at the Prince's side; Iron Axe asked that a team of one hundred soldiers be dispatched as an escort; Barov used the excuse that Roland was needed to review and approve some important decrees that the City Hall would be releasing, making it necessary that he remained in the castle. This went on, until he finally felt he had no other alternative than to put out a lord's airs and command everyone to act in accordance with his orders.

"Your Highness, I do not understand. In the end, what is so important about these circumstances, that you personally must go?" Barov asked in confusion.

"This is a matter which concerns the Western Territory... so much that it might even decide the life or death of the Kingdom of Graycastle," Roland said, then was silent for a moment before opening his mouth once more, "And only I have the ability to make the best judgment."

“You cannot... tell us the particular cause?”

“For the time being I can’t, but there will come a day when you will understand.” He shook his head. “Also, this trip is a secret operation; you are not allowed to reveal this information to anyone.”

The fact that the Devils headquarters was merely about two hundred kilometers west of the Western Border, the very Devils who had once destroyed the Holy City of Taqila and forced the last defenders to the edge of the mainland, and turned the wildlands into a forbidden area no one even dared to set a foot, is all too frightening to say out loud.

For me it is tolerable, after all, I got a lot out of all the extermination movies I saw, even so, the thought still makes me feel numb; for them however, I’m afraid that others cannot simply accept something like that. Once the news is leaked, it will only turn into more trouble. In case it was to causes a panic among my subjects, it might even lead to many people fleeing from the Western Territory.

Thus, at present, it is not the right time to declare the truth.

After finishing all political affairs, Roland and the witches entered the hot air balloon, and lifted off, leaving the castle front yard and heading into the sky, in the directions of the snow-capped mountain.

“Your Royal Highness, if we assume that it was indeed the Church who has been fighting against the Devils four hundred years ago, does that make them good or bad?” Since discovering the existence of the Devils, it seemed that Sylvie had become preoccupied by some troubles.

“Of course they are still bad,” Roland didn’t even get to open his mouth before Nightingale gave her answer. “Have you ever seen a good person hunting a witch for no reason? In the case that we really were the Devils minions, all of us sisters would know about it. But there isn’t even a bit of relationship between us witches and the Devils, the demonic bite is also a complete myth.

However, the other person still observed Roland, seemingly waiting to hear his answer.

He thought for a while then started to speak, “First of all, it is still not confirmed that it was the Church who had fought against the Devils. If they had indeed made such great sacrifices, for what reason would they conceal all the information about it and destroy the past? This news would have been the best way for them to expand their base of believers. I am afraid that we can only answer the questions truthfully if we are able to find more clues about the past. Also, good and evil cannot be distinguished so easily; it is always dependent on the place you are standing at.” Roland paused for a moment to give her a smile, then he asked, “However, I believe what you really wanted to know was, if I would go to the Church to fight with them against the Devils, isn’t that right?”

“I...” Sylvie wanted to say something, but in the end, she couldn’t deny it.

“The Church and I are incompatible, even if there were any witches, I would not be able to stand on the same side as them,” he said, “That is even more now that I have all of you by my side.”

“I also want to speak,” Nightingale said, showed a complacent smile. “Even if it was the Church who had fought the Devils before, they still lost, or might even have suffered some other kind of crushing defeat. In His Highness words, ‘if you do not know who is going to win or lose, for what reason would you want to rely on the losing side’?”

“... I see,” Sylvie nodded gently, and her uneasiness seeming to loosen up somewhat.

Time passed. And when dusk fell, the group of people were vaguely able to see the contours of the snow-capped mountain.

It is indeed incomparable huge, Roland thought, even I have seldom seen such a towering peak with my own eyes. There doesn't exist any other similar mountains within the mountain range, it's as if the earth doesn't have any inclination to rise in general, leaving only one road leading to the skies. The overcast mountain wall occupied more than half of the horizon, if we'd wanted to bypass the mountains by land, I am afraid we would have to spend several months to do so.

The selected camping site was located at the top of a mountain nearer to the sea, making it easy for them to observe the movement around them. Furthermore, it was also far enough from

the Concealing Forest, to ensure that it would be impossible for any beast to sneak up on the camp.

After gnawing at their rations, everyone began to set up their tent. Due to the limited weight capacity of the hot air balloon, they were only able to take a single large tent with them. Therefore, Roland showing a noble character and unquestionable integrity, offered the witches the use of the tent and decided that he would sleep in the basket while Maggie decided to take a tree – since, if she turned into a bird, she was able to sleep while standing.

He discovered that in the end, he was still too thin skinned, making it impossible for him to crowd into the tent to sleep together with the witches. Even when Wendy and Soraya suggested that they would take the basket so that the Prince could sleep in the tent, he still refused them.

While they were arranging their accommodations, Sylvie was the only one who was warily staring at Roland, her gaze was so intense that in the end he didn't know whether he was supposed to laugh or cry.

After arranging the night vigil, every one of them entered the tent one after another. Due to the uneven bottom of the basket, Roland had some problems falling asleep. Thus he sat on a rock while facing the sea, stared blankly at the moonlight that was sparkling on the sea's surface.

At this time, he heard some subtle footsteps coming from behind.

When the Prince turned around, he discovered that it was Anna.

Previously, back when he had been attending school, he'd always had some anticipation that "maybe something is going to happen" within his heart when he went on social travel. And even though most of the endings ended with delusion, this never prevented him from looking forward to the next event.

However, when it came true, Roland found out that contrary to his expectation, his heartbeat sped up even more. Feigning as if nothing was out of the ordinary, he lifted an eyebrow and asked, "What happened, can't you fall asleep?"

"No," Anna said bluntly, "I merely want to accompany you."

"That's it?" He coughed twice, "Thanks."

"It should be me thanking you," Anna said as she smiled. The silver moonlight sparkled on her face, emitting a faint radiance; her peaceful blue eyes seems to be deeper than the sea, "Those words you said to Sylvie...although she did not thank you, I could still see that her mood had become a lot better."

"Are you happy for her?"

"No," she shook her head. "I'm happy about my choice."

Roland asked startled, "What... choice?"

Instead of answering, Anna closed her eyes and kissed him on the cheek. After a long time, she whispered, “Good night, Your Highness.”

This can be regarded as “something has happened”... right?

Seeing her back disappear into the tent, Roland stretched his body to his heart’s content, the moment he intended to return to the basket to sleep, a pair of invisible hands took hold of his face. The area in front of him was obviously empty, yet he once again felt a soft touch, but this time, it was on the other side. “I also thank you, Your Highness, for doing so much for us witches.”

Chapter 294 - The Devil's Attack Arrives

In the early morning hours of the next day, everyone packed up their camping belongings as they prepared to set out on their journey once again.

Roland also discovered a new detail: Even if they slept in the wilderness, the witches' appearance wasn't affected in the slightest, something which obviously wasn't the case for himself. Even without taking a look in the mirror, he still guessed that his hair appeared to be a mess, and due to his insomnia, his face lacked color, and his skin was covered in a layer of semi-dry sweat, which felt sticky whenever he touched it. All this together most likely gave him a dispirited and downcast look in everyone's eyes. Only after he had washed his face and rinsed his mouth with some drinking water from his leather bag, was he finally able to bring some relief to the ill feeling he was having.

Roland was already beginning to miss the water system with its spacious shower in the castle.

An hour later, having followed lightning's directions, Cloud Gazer arrived at the predetermined location – the side of the snow-capped mountain. As they hovered over the vast sea, the people in the group could all see the scene behind the mountain.

It was just like Lightning had said, the landscape at the back of the snow-capped mountain was covered in a red mist, and with the atmospheric pressure of the fog being very low, its color became deeper the closer it was to the ground. In order to see farther, Roland had the hot air balloon continue to rise so that they could

see a part of the flat and dry land which was spread out at the end of the horizon.

“Is there anything you could discover?” Roland asked into the direction of Sylvie.

The latter shook her head and said, “No, it’s too far away. It is beyond the scope of the Eye of Truth.”

“Then let’s wait for Soraya to draw a picture of the scene before approaching it further,” Roland ordered.

While they were waiting for Soraya to draw the picture, Roland used an observation mirror to look at the coastal line. Aside from the cliffs and the rocky beach, there weren’t any wharfs, docks, or other human-made buildings. It seemed that even though there were Devils here, they weren’t going to build ships to attack Graycastle from the sea. Observing this let him feel somewhat relieved.

With the hot air balloon slowly approaching the land, Sylvie was finally able to see the actual situation and gave her report. Probably a bit more than ten miles away from the sea, she could see a pile of black stone buildings, with a triangular form reminiscent of a spire.

“That’s just like what we saw from the mirage at the barbarian wasteland,” Wendy, unable to restrain her emotions any longer, exclaimed aloud, “This really is the Devil’s territory!”

“But the height is clearly wrong,” Soraya said with a frown, “The spires in the mirage were as high as a hundred feet. Furthermore, they weren’t covered by a red mist. They are supposed to be higher than all the surrounding hills.”

“Maybe, at that time, you saw the Devils’ City, and what we see here, is closer to a Devils’ Town?” Anna guessed.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Devils possess a kind of intact and unique urban system, and that they also belong to a higher evolved species that is keen to expand its territory and kill? Roland thought to himself, please, there mustn’t be too many of them, “What can you say about the inside of those spires?”

“Uh... most of those towers are empty, while some of them are filled with some kind of liquid... hold on!” Sylvie became shocked, at first unable to believe what she was seeing, before shouting, “Quickly leave, the Devils found us!”

“They discovered us?” Roland once more raised his observation mirror, but everything was still dark red, making it impossible for him to see everything clearly.

“They began to move,” Sylvie yelled nervously. “Before, they were all buried in the ground, and only the pipe on their back was exposed. Over there... there are Devils that began to fly up!”

“Wendy, retreat at full speed!” Roland commanded.

The wind began blowing strongly from the side, the sudden movement of the hot air balloon made the basket slant to one side while the taut ropes all issued a creaking sound.

However, Sylvie's following warning caused everyone's heart to turn cold.

"Two Devils are rushing in our direction, and they have mounts that can fly!"

To hell with it! These guys have flying mounts!? Roland stared with wide eyes toward the red mist. This is simply against common sense, if they are able to carry a tall and bulky person on your back, how large are these mounts?

Before long however, he already caught sight of two black spots which came into his field of view. Looking at the demonic beasts through his observation mirror, he was only able to see the saddle at their hip, their sharp fangs, and their hairless body, with a basic form which was similar to birds. If he wasn't mistaken... then they were actually two mixed species of demonic beasts!

"Head down to the ground, we are landing as soon as possible," Roland squeezed those few words through his gritted teeth.

For now, this was the main idea. He had never thought that the Devils possessed the ability to pursue them through the air, and furthermore, the only one who could fight while flying was Lightning. But when he looked at her pale face, he knew that there was no hope for her to win this battle. Once they caught up, even if

the other side merely went for a collision attack against the balloon, they would still be able to take the lives of all of the witches – even if the coating would be robust enough to resist the impact and the bite of the demonic beasts, under the resulting violent shaking, it was most likely that they would all fall out of the basket and drop into the sea like stones.

And at this height, there was no difference between hitting solid ground or falling into the sea.

By now the Devils had come so close to the hot air balloon that even without the help of the mirror, Roland was already able to see these winged mixed species and the big and sturdy enemy it was carrying on its back.

“Be careful,” Sylvie shrieked again. “They are getting ready to throw their spears!”

When he heard the warning, his mind was suddenly flooded with the scenes of the previous battles which had been described by Leaves – last time the enemy had acted in this way; they had taken Scarlet’s life in a flash.

He did not see the Devil extend its arm; he didn’t even see the incoming spear. However, the moment Sylvie had issued her warning, Anna had stretched out her hands, and controlled her fire to form an extremely thin shield to block the front of the basket.

A loud “bang”, “bang” sound rang out a moment later.

Anna released a suppressed groan, took two steps back, while her black fire shattered like glass into numerous pieces. The spears turned into half burned irons, and dropped into the rolling sea.

She'd used a dense black fire curtain to block the attack.

The other witches sighed out in relief; only Roland still kept worrying – after all, he knew that when she used her ability like this, it would greatly consume her magic power. This was something, Roland had already noticed when he saw her smelting steel. If she used it only for heating or cutting, her vast amount of magic power would almost never dry up. However, once she expanded her influence to the macro level and tried to form a dense body to influence the whole object all at once, the amount of magic power she needed multiplied exponentially. For example, when she used her black flame as a furnace, by keeping the molten steel from flowing over to the outside wall, it would increase her magic consumption. And if she wanted to lift up the entire black fire furnace, even Anna could hold on for only a few minutes.

So, it was obviously, that the barrier just now had consumed quite a lot of her power. If they were to throw their spears twice, Roland was afraid that even heating the air for the balloon would become impossible for her.

It seemed as if the Devils had been shocked by the scene they'd witnessed. Because rather than following-up with another attack, they instead chose to sweep past on both sides of the hot air balloon as if they were waiting for the right moment. By now they were so close, it was the first time that Roland could see the

enemy's ferocious appearance – it was exactly the same as in the picture. They wore demonic beast's skulls as their helmets, and their eyes were covered with scarlet red crystal pieces, they also had a leather pipe running from their chin, which went past their neck and to the carapace on their back.

In the meantime, the other witches had already pulled out their revolvers, but since the basket was constantly swaying it was almost impossible for them to hit an enemy that was moving at such high speed. Even after depleting two rounds of bullets, they still hadn't hit the target.

At this moment, the Devil's arms extended once again, only this time, they had instead chosen to attack from the front and the back.

There wasn't even enough time for Anna to see the enemy at her back, so when she summoned her black flame, all she could do was cover the one side. Roland however, even though he was unable to follow the path of the spear, instinctively knew that the spear had been targeted at her. He almost subconsciously threw himself at Anna's back to push her out of the way, before he felt an impact on his shoulder, as if someone had ferociously smashed it with a hammer. His whole body lifted into the air, and crashed into the basket's wall.

The burst of unbearable pain almost ripped him apart, followed by a strong sense of dizziness, as if his consciousness was leaving him.

Roland tightly clenched his teeth and turned his head to the side,

merely to see that at the place his shoulder should have been, only a huge gap now remained – the hole in the basket at his back was sufficient to show the power of this blow.

This last round of attacks had completely ripped off the corner of the basket. While the blood which endlessly came pouring out, dyed his clothes red.

“No!” Nightingale’s heart-wrenching cry was the last thing he could hear before he lost consciousness.

Chapter 295 - Wings Spreading Out

The moment that Nightingale saw Roland get hit, she could suddenly feel her stomach tightening.

The surrounding noises all became incomparable distant. When she tried to lift his body, she discovered that it had become stiff and cold, only his hands were still slightly trembling. Apart from her subconscious frightened shout at the beginning, she realized that even taking a step forward felt like an incomparable challenge.

She was afraid that Roland, lying in her bosom was steadily losing his warmth.

She was also afraid that he would never wake up again.

Just thinking of these things made it hard for her to breath.

Never in her life had she ever felt so helpless.

It was Anna who responded first – she crouched down and covered the wound with her black flame. White smoke immediately began to rise from the lightless flame while emitting a “zizi” sounds. When the black flame dissipated, the place where Roland’s arm had been torn off had already become scorched black.

However, the unceasingly flowing blood had stopped at least.

That's right, this was the emergency measure he had taught us during the first aid class, but what was the rest? 'Wrap the wound and quickly go to the hospital to find Nana'... Nightingale swallowed a mouthful of saliva, sweeping her gaze over the basket, no, no, Nana isn't with us, she's in Border Town.

We have to go back.

We must go back as soon as possible!

She slowly turned her head to the Southeast, looking in the direction of Border Town –

At this moment, the Devils' fierce appearance, with them baring their fangs, and brandishing their claws came into Nightingale's view once again, pulling her thoughts back to the current situation inside the basket.

The panicked shouts of the witches, the cracking sound of the revolvers, and the low growls of the enemy all came back into her perception. After the coldness subsided, all the various and disorderly thoughts in her mind finally came together to become one.

"Don't try to beat the Devils, if they catch up; we are unable to return to Border Town."

"Lightning!" Anna exclaimed anxiously, "Protect the hot air

balloon!”

Although the little girl’s complexion was pale, after looking towards the still unconscious Roland, she gritted her teeth and nodded before she flew out of the basket.

No, Nightingale thought, just by looking at her appearance it is clear that she cannot handle the Devils. Like most witches, Lightning has no experience with fighting a real enemy.

I am the only one here who can defeat the Devils.

Nightingale took a deep breath, she forced all of her thoughts concerning the wounded Prince behind a makeshift veil at the back of her mind. The two Devils are still flying, forming a pincer attack, one at the front, and one at the back. Their throwing arms were as skinny and shriveled as firewood; perhaps it will still take a comparatively long moment before they can fully be restored. But from the hot air balloon to where they are is approximately fifty meters, a distance I’m utterly unable to cross – if she cast her fog high up in the sky it was incredibly easy for her slip through and fall, the higher up off the ground she was, the rarer the “lines” she could travel along became. And if she remained on one line for an extended amount of time, the direction of the lines could begin to turn upside down, which could even result in her being torn into several pieces.

Perhaps the Devils were also aware that once the hot air balloon landed their situation could become tricky. Thus, one Devil waved his three-fingered left hand, and shouted something out loud, then pulled at the reins of his mount and came rushing straight at the

balloon.

At the same time, the other fiercely pounced toward Lightning. Flapping its immense wings, the demonic beast just looked like a falcon seizing a fledgling, taking its time to wear it out. Just like Nightingale had expected, Lightning was already hard-pressed to protect herself by relying on her nimble movement, making it impossible for her to aim and fire at the enemy. Also, the other witches, now afraid of accidentally hitting the little girl had also stopped shooting.

Meanwhile the other mount randomly bit and clawed at the balloon's sac, but fortunately, Soraya's coating was tough enough to fend off the demonic beast's claws and tooth. Realizing that its action was in vain, the Demon roared and flew far away, seemingly wanting to use the force of an impact to throw the balloon off balance.

Nightingale realized that this would be her best opportunity.

She released her fog, and the moment a slightly glowing thread appeared on top of her head, she stepped on it without hesitation. She took advantage of the quickly changing outline of the balloon, and was standing on top of the air sac a moment later. Although her body was parallel with the ground, it seemed as if she was walking on level ground, thus she was quickly able to run her way to the balloon's peak.

At this moment, the Devil was also rushing toward them.

In her world of black and white, Nightingale was surprised to discover that the Devil also had a sparse and slowly rotating magic cyclone, and its thin arm was also inlaid with a sparkling stone.

Do they also possess magic?

But this wasn't the time to be paying attention to this, for her dash of ten meters was nothing more than the blink of an eye. So, the moment the Devil was about to hit the hot air balloon, Nightingale had also come out of her fog and appeared behind the Devil.

Because of the sudden increase of the weight, the giant winged demonic beast suddenly dropped. The Devil, as if it was aware that something was amiss, turned around, only to be greeted with the roar coming from Nightingale's 12mm revolver.

“Go to hell!”

The bullet together with a flame and smoke rushed out of its cartridge. And then, entered and pierced through the Devil's head with a great force, opening a bowl like hole at the back of its head. Sticky blood splashed out the next instant, and a pungent smell assaulted her nose.

The enemy twitched before toppling over which deflected the demonic beast's movement and caused it to pass by the side of the hot air balloon. Just as Nightingale was about to leap back to the top of the airbag, an accident happened. The falling corpse pulled at the reins, and the beast abruptly rolled over and threw her off.

Before she even had the chance to react, Nightingale was already out of a safe return distance.

Although the hot air balloon has been reducing its height, at the moment it was still hundreds of meters above the sea. Stepping into the fog while falling was no different from committing suicide – if Nightingale couldn't control her posture and bump into whichever thin line was available, she'd immediately be cut into two.

“Nightingale!”

She heard her sisters cry in horror, but everything seemed useless. Lightning was currently fighting against the other Devil, while Maggie, even if she changed into a sea bird would still be unable to carry her. Thus she knew what would happen next.

The speed of her fall accelerated more and more, and when Nightingale looked down, the ocean, which was originally a blur, revealed its true form. The rolling and splashing waves became more and more clear – it didn't look as if she was falling, rather it was as if the sea was coming towards her.

The nearer the inevitable moment came, the clearer were her thoughts.

Nightingale closed her eyes, and once again seeing the moment she'd first met Roland. She'd sat on the edge of the bed, and was playing with the dagger in her hand, waiting for the gray-haired

4th Prince to push open the door and enter. The flickering fire, the door, and the bedroom gradually began to fade, ultimately, only leaving his smiling face behind.

Her only regret was that she wasn't able to accompany him to the end.

“GooGoo!”

Suddenly, a series of high tweets sounded. When Nightingale opened her eyes, she saw a white figure rushing straight down, throwing herself at Nightingale's chest.

It was Maggie.

Just when she wanted to say something, the pigeon began to emit eye-piercing bright ray of light, her body began to expand immediately and a pair of enormous flesh like wings opened themselves at her back, her feathers all fell off, and her bird's head became both fierce and terrifying. She looked exactly the same as a flying demonic beast!

“Ahool——!”

Maggie released a deafening roar, caught Nightingale with her claws and yanked her upwards. The latter half rolled around in the sky before landing on the bird's broad back.

What exactly is going on? Nightingale was completely shocked.

“Ahool ahool!” Maggie shouted once more, apparently, she wanted to remind her of something.

This time even without translation, Nightingale was able to understand the other’s meaning. Although she couldn’t understand why Maggie was able to change into this form, but right now, the most important thing was to defeat the Devil.

“Come on,” she shouted.

Chapter 296 - Demon

The situation reversed the instant after Maggie, carrying Nightingale on her back, joined the battle.

Being forced to give up the pursuit of the nimble Lightning, the Devil released an angry howl, rolled around and dived down, throwing itself against the fast-incoming Maggie. The arm, which hadn't been fully restored yet, raised another spear, then expanded so quickly that the skin began to crack and a bloody mist began spraying out.

Even though it spent all of its power, the thrown spear which was thrown this time, no longer had its original might. At least now, Nightingale was able to see the trajectory of the spear.

“Maggie!” She patted the back of the giant creature beneath her, then released her fog and stepped into it.

“Ahool – Goo!” At the same time, Maggie's body began to sharply reduce in size, once again turning into a pigeon.

As the huge target suddenly disappeared, the spear sped past the two with a whistling sound before falling into the sea.

At the next moment, Nightingale reappeared from the fog, and Maggie returned to her demonic beast form. The whole process of dodging had been as natural as the moving clouds and the flowing water.

The devil let out a painful anguished wailing, its arm began to shrink, until it was only an inch thick then broke, just like an overstrained branch. But its left hand was still firmly gripping the reins, moving the beast to confront them. Looking at its posture, it seemed as if it wanted to crash into the two of them, as if it had given up all thoughts of ever returning.

However, Maggie obviously never intended to fulfill its wish, moments before the collision, she suddenly let her body dropped, letting the enemy pass by instead. When she regained her balance once more, Nightingale had already disappeared from her back.

The latter was just like a ghost as she appeared behind the Devil.

The enemy hurriedly tried to untie the rope it was holding, however, Nightingale would obviously never give it the chance to do so.

It was as if she was releasing all of her pent-up anger as she pulled the trigger and the gunfire sounded out continuously.

This round of shooting not only broke the carapace at the back of the Devil but also ran through its chest. The enemy issued a series of hoarse sounds, gasping for air and quickly collapsed into the everporating bloody mist.

And lastly, the now masterless demonic beast also died under Lightning's attack and fell into the sea, disappearing soon after.

The cloud gazer slowly landed on the shore.

“What should we do next?” Nightingale asked anxiously as she looked at Anna, it seemed that only she’d only been able to stay cool-headed during the battle.

“We’re so far away that even if we flew through the whole night, the hot air balloon will still take until midnight before it can reach Border Town,” Anna stated their situation, “Therefore, Lightning and Maggie have to carry His Highness on her back, and set off in advance.

“No problem ahool!” The giant beast, lying with its head at their side, opened its mouth and spoke.

“I... also have no problem with it, we will deliver him.” The little girl’s expression seemed somewhat gloomy, probably thinking about her capability as an explorer. The fact that she’d been too afraid to fight the enemy, had caused everyone to fall into so much difficulty.

Nightingale touched her head, “No one has ever been good at it from the beginning, this isn’t your fault.”

Together, the witches tied the still unconsciously Prince onto Maggie’s back, after they finished, Lightning took her place beside him. They then soared into the sky, flying all the way along the Redwater River while heading towards Border Town.

“And we?” Wendy asked, “My magic will soon run out.”

“Continue to fly, as far as possible. Perhaps the enemy will dispatch a second troop to look for us. This place is still too close to the snow-capped mountain; we have to leave it behind as far as possible.” Anna said, “Wait until we reach a safety zone, we will then look for a place to hide and make camp.”

Her decision was unanimously endorsed by the remaining witches.

When cloud gazer rose again, there were only five people left in the basket this time.

“In the end, how have the Devils been able to discover us?” Soraya asked, feeling puzzled. “Both the hot air balloon and the basket are painted with sky camouflage. Furthermore, at the height of two thousand meters, it is hard to identify us even by using an observation mirror.”

“There was a colossal Devil,” Sylvie said while knitting her brows. “It crouched on the top of one of those black spires, it had a head that was larger than its body. Its head was covered with countless eyes. Even though I merely gazed at it... it immediately turned all of its eyes towards me. And hundreds of Devils came rushing forth from within the ground, it was as if the whole area had started boiling.

“There really exist such a monster?” Soraya gasped in shock.

“There is still more, those two flying mounts were also very strange,” Anna voiced her thoughts, “After getting hit by the bullets, the blood flowing out of them wasn’t black as you would expect, but rather a deep blue – this is entirely different compared to the mixed species we’d encountered during the Months of Demons.”

“But on the contrary, it is similar to the Devils,” Soraya replied, “I saw that the first Devil Nightingale shot, also had blue blood coming out of its wounds.”

“In the end, aren’t they demonic beasts?” Sylvie asked.

“That I do not know... but it is great that Maggie can change her appearance into theirs,” Wendy exclaimed. “If it hadn’t been for her saving Nightingale, we would all have been in danger.”

“Her ability has evolved,” Nightingale, having stayed silent until now, suddenly opened her mouth. “I saw that the magic source inside her body no longer had the form of turning cyclone, it has turned into a fixed shape instead – a pair of outstretched white wings.”

While holding His Highness’ arm, Lightning’s heart was filled with endless guilt.

The Devil merely has a malevolent appearance, when in the sky,

with its large body, it wasn't able to respond quickly. If I'd just left the basket to block the enemy at the beginning, His Royal Highness wouldn't have been so seriously injured.

To bravely step forward and protect one's companion is the unshirkable responsibility of an explorer. Whenever Thunder went on an exploration in the Fjords, he would always take the lead whenever they encountered any danger. Taking everyone along so as to break through all incoming crises, whether it be against pirates or a monster from the deep sea, he never took a step back.

For the first time, Lighting realized that she had still a huge distance to go before she could call herself a great explorer.

But her father had also mentioned that while fear can be fought off by acknowledging and becoming familiar with it, skills could be mastered through repeated training.

She made a firm resolution that she would wait until His Highness' injury was fully healed. And would then beg him to give her a specialized pistol and request older sister Nightingale to teach her how to shoot and fight.

"How is His Highness, ahool?" Maggie muttered. Compared with the pigeon's voice, her voice was now rough and muddy, like the wind blowing out of a stone cave. "I felt that his body has become colder, ahool."

The little girl clenched her fists and turned around to fly back to

Maggie.

Only to see that Roland had closed his eyes, his lips were pale, and together with his messy gray hair, he even seemed to be somewhat lifeless. The blood on his clothes had already solidified, while the black burn wound looked like a spectacle which was too horrible to endure. She gently placed her hand on his neck, feeling for a weak beat to prove that His Highness was still alive; only to feel the skin under her fingertips was frightening ice-cold.

“How much magic do you have left?” Lightning estimated the rest of their journey, “We will have to go at full speed.”

“Ahool!”

When the two witches arrived at Border Town, the little girl's vision already became faint and blurred. Flying at high speed not only quickly deplete her magic, but it also put a great burden on her body. She gritted her teeth, using the last bit of her strength to directly fly into the castle front courtyard, while shouting to the guards, who had come over to investigate the noise, “Quickly call Miss Nana, the Prince has been wounded!”

Chapter 297 - A Burning Hot Heart

Roland opened his eyes. He was lying on a soft bed, with the familiar ceiling above his head, matching every crack in his memories.

This is my own... bedroom

He turned his head and at his shoulders on both sides – whether it was the left or right one, they both looked to be in a good condition. And as he tried to move his hands, he also didn't come across any problem.

It's as if everything was just a long dream.

He knew however, that it hadn't been a dream; the investigation of the Devils, and the attacks they had faced was indeed something which had happened! However, the fact that he was lying safely in the bedroom, meant that they had managed to escape the Devil's pursuit, and had successfully returned to the castle.

However, did all of the witches make it back safely?

Thinking of this, Roland couldn't stop his heart from becoming heavy. He tried to prop himself up, but from the direction of his injured arm a burst of powerlessness spread throughout his body. Just when he wanted to open his mouth to call someone, he saw a row of witches leaning against the wall next to his bed. They were Anna, Nightingale, Lightning, Maggie and Nana. They leaned against each other's shoulders, and were breathing steadily, with

their eyes slightly closed, looking as if they were fast asleep.

Roland quietly opened the corner of the window curtains, he was greeted by the first rays of the morning sun which came pouring in from the direction of the Redwater River like dazzling golden threads across the earth.

“You... woke up?”

Turning around, he didn't know when, but Anna, rubbing her tired eyes, had already woken up and step by step had come to stand by his side.

“Yes, I'm up. The other witches...”

“They all safely made it back to Border Town. In fact, you were the only one who was injured.”

“Is that so?” Roland said relieved, “That's really good -“

“Fool.”

He didn't even have a chance to refute before the other side was already nervously hugging him with so much force that it felt like she wanted to embed herself into his flesh.

Due to Anna's commotion, the other witches also started waking up.

“Your Highness!”

They stood up in surprise and then began to circle around him one after another. Lightning was the second to cling to Roland, followed by Nana and Maggie. Nightingale hesitated, but also wrapped her arms around him. In this way, everyone was embracing each other in a group hug, all were reluctant to let go... for a moment it seemed time had come to a stop.

After breakfast, Roland went back to his office and listened to details of what had happened after his collapse, trying to understand what had occurred in the end.

The witches, working hand in hand, had been able to defeat their pursuers then had Lightning and Maggie carry him back in advance.

After coming back to the castle, Nana Pine immediately treated his injuries, healed his torn off arm back to its previous state. However, due to his severe blood loss, he'd fallen into a deep sleep for a day afterward. Thus, this was already the fourth day since their departure.

Thinking back to his actions, he had to admit that he had been somewhat careless. He had never expected that the Devils would actually be able to discover a hot air balloon painted in sky camouflage more than ten kilometers away. Listening to Sylvie's explanation, it seemed that the massive multi-eyed Devil hadn't

detected anything abnormal in the beginning and had been observing all direction with its eyes. However, the moment she moved her focus to the body of the multi-eyed Devil, the other side immediately responded, instantly turning all of its eyes towards her.

This kind of detection, contrary to what one might expect, was unheard of; it was important to know that at this distance, apart from Sylvie's Eye of Truth, even when using an observation mirror the view would still be fuzzy. In addition, there was also the red mist covering the spires, making it even more difficult to clearly see the happenings within the Devil's town. Accordingly, it should also have been difficult for the other side to discover their whereabouts.

That said, even though they had met with great danger during this trip, the harvest of information was just as bountiful.

The Devils were no longer those mysterious and unknown messengers of hell – instead, they also had cities and towns, an organized structure, and thus can be classified as a higher evolved civilization, just like humans were.

Furthermore, the other side's air force wasn't powerful at all, at least this was the case for the group of Devils behind the snow-capped mountain. Even though there had been hundreds of Devils which had come out of the ground, in the end, there were only two who had pursued them with flying mounts. This indicated that they could safely assume that flying was still a rare ability among them – whether it was the mounts or the riders that was rare, was still unknown. But to sum it up, this was some good news for

Border Town. At least he didn't have to worry about a group of Devils bypassing the Southern hills and mountains to go straight for the hinterlands of the Western Territory to burn, kill and loot from them.

Also, the news that the Devils' possessed magic was an important discovery.

According to Nightingale's report, even though the amount of magic power within the Devils coming after them was sparse, it was still enough to form a cyclone, and was also very eye-catching while in its foggy state. However, their way of arousing magic seemed to be entirely different from the witches. They didn't perform it by themselves, but instead used a certain kind of mechanism – for example, by using those shining stones to release their force. Therefore, it wasn't like the witches' ability which could undergo constant changes, but more like a standard weapon which could be mass-produced.

Of course, this was merely his own speculation. Unfortunately, both of those Devil's bodies had fallen into the sea, making it impossible for Roland to verify it further.

The last point was their buildings.

Those small and slender black stone spires were not the Devil's dwelling places. Furthermore, their construction material was also very strange, since it didn't show any traces of corrosion from the red mist. While the inside of some of the stone towers was empty, others were filled with a red liquid, which let them unexpectedly appear to be storage tanks.

Could it be that the red mist in the sky is actually the gaseous state of that liquid?

And could the reason why the Devil's aren't further spread over the wilderness or even further expanded toward the Four Kingdoms be because of the limited amount of this gas?

In any case, after comprehending all of the gathered information, I can conclude that for now, they won't be a threat to the security of Border Town.

But Roland also knew that since they had already driven humanity out of the wilderness more than four hundred years ago, there might come a day where they would attack again. Which he would need to make preparation for.

Due to his severe blood loss, when night fell, Roland decided to leave the unfinished government task for another day and left for bed quite early.

As he was sitting on the bedside looking through a history book and preparing to blow the candle out to sleep, a knock came from the other side of the door and resounded through the room.

After a short hesitation, he still climbed out of bed to open the door, to see Anna standing before him.

This time she wasn't holding a thick book in her hands like she had been in the past – neither “Intermediate Physics” or the “Theoretical Foundation of Natural Science”, instead she'd come empty handed and wore only a white robe. She stepped into the room. She wasn't even wearing shoes, so whenever her delicate foot kissed the floor, there wasn't any trace of sound to be heard.

Stepping aside, Roland swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

After stepping through the door, Anna turned around, closed it, and shut the bolt. Then she took Roland's hand and went to the bed.

He could see that she had recently washed her hair, and within the candlelight her let down hair also had a golden luster to it. Being so close, an intoxicating fragrance filled his nose – this enchanting fragrance wasn't originating from perfumed rose soap but came from herself.

Her long eyelashes trembled slightly, her cheeks were flushed, and her blue eyes were as clear as limpid autumn waters. Although she appeared to be somewhat nervous, there wasn't any trace of hesitation in her. Instead, her eyes, looking straight at Roland, were filled with resolution.

Even someone as he who'd never weathered such a great battle, at this moment, he clearly understood her meaning.

“Cough, this...”

“I do not want to wait any longer,” Anna whispered, “Especially after what we’d experienced.” She paused, “I don’t want to regret anything.”

Chapter 298 - Dream

“I see,” Roland put his hands around her, carried her by the waist and set her gently on top of the bed. This simple action was already enough to make him breathless. He opened the thin blanket, and went to lay on the bed next to Anna with her head nestled on his arm.

The next step should be... foreplay?

Roland discovered that he was much too nervous, it can't go on like this, as someone known as an “experienced” person, I cannot make a fool out of myself in front of a little girl. Maybe I'll be able to ease the mood with a light chat and then do the action, for example... maybe some lines from a porno?

As he was still racking his brain, Anna's soft voice sounded in his ear: “That time in the hot air balloon when you pushed me out of the way, did you ever think about the possibility that you might die?”

Roland felt shocked; he'd never expected that she would ask him this question, “I just did it without thinking.”

“You are someone who will become the ruler of Graycastle, you are also the hope of us witches,” she whispered, “I am unworthy of you doing so much for me.”

“This isn't a question of worth,” Roland murmured. “I cannot just stand by the side and watch indifferently as you suffer an

attack. As a matter of fact, even now, after waking up and thinking about it carefully, I can tell you that in case it hadn't happened so suddenly and if I had the time to think it over, I would still have acted in the same way."

"There is nothing I can do to prevent you from doing it again, right?"

"Yes, there is nothing," Roland said as he pinched her nose with his other hand.

Anna's eyelashes fell, and after a moment of silence, she opened her mouth once more, "Can you tell me something about your past... I would like to know more about you."

"Oh, the past," Roland said, he took a deep breath then searched through the 4th Prince's memories, while preparing to tell one or two entertaining anecdotes of his life in the palace. But before the words could leave his mouth, he swallowed them back down. His past wasn't the life he had here, but the life he'd lived in another, very different world; so instead he said, "I used to live in a big city, in a tremendously big city."

"Yes, Graycastle's King's City is several times larger than Border Town."

"When I was born, I wasn't any different from any other ordinary person, I was somewhat clever in trivial matters, but not so intelligent that I could do everything at ease. In regards to studying, I could be considered as hardworking, thus I would often

receive praise from the teacher. But he didn't know, that I was the one who had drawn the hard to erase graffiti on the classroom walls."

"He certainly wouldn't dare to blame you." Anna murmured.

"Haha, that's unlikely. It wouldn't have been necessary for him to do anything to me, he merely needed to inform my parents," Roland smiled, then shook his head. "At that time, they taught me to never start off leniently.

"Then, as I grew older, my teachers kept changing, from primary school teachers, to academic advisors, until I finally completed my studies having had neither good nor bad grades. Of course, compared to other people's children, in the end, I still fell short by a bit..."

He half-closed his eyes, being able to speak about his experiences after altering them a bit and no longer concealing them, gave him a feeling of freedom he hadn't felt in a very long time since he'd crossed over. Since his arrival, he had been playing the role of the Prince, but right now, he felt as if he was returning to his past. As if he was only lying in a hotel room designed to fit a classic style, together with the girl he liked, making one another feel safe and warm. Thanks to this, his nervous mood also gradually relaxed.

Is perhaps now the time for the next step?

Roland turned his head slightly, only to discover that Anna had already closed her eyes, and her chest, snugly placed at his side,

was calmly moving up and down, looking like a kitten which had stepped into the land of dreams.

He just stared blankly at her for a moment, but soon after he couldn't stop himself from laughing out loud.

So it was like this... she was also tired.

Think of it, to conceal their whereabouts; the witches had looked for a small hidden place within the mountain ridge two nights ago. But they still needed to guard against any possible beast or Devil attacks during the night, which had meant that they'd almost gotten no sleep during the night. And then, the next morning, even as the sun had only just lightened up the sky, they'd already continued their race on Cloud Gazer while heading back towards Border Town. At the castle, Anna had also spent the last night in his bedroom, constantly keeping watch over him. Thus, during the last two days and nights she hadn't even had one moment of rest, making it very easy for her tiredness to overwhelm her the moment she let herself relax. It would be a wonder if she weren't exhausted right now.

The other side's reason for coming this day, might be because she was too anxious to wait any longer.

Although it was a pity, Roland did not care about this opportunity passing, after all, there were still many days ahead of them.

He moved closer, kissed Anna's eyelashes, then whispered, "Good

night.”

When the morning light fell through the window curtains into the room, Sylvie climbed out of bed unable to suppress her yawn.

The experiences of the last days seemed just like a dream, from the discovery of the Devils to the fight in the air, and lastly their escape back to Border Town, gave her the thought, that even if they had been encircled and chased by the Church’s Army of Judges, she wouldn’t feel as tense and exhausted like now.

“Good morning,” Wendy, having changed her clothes long ago was now carrying a basin of water prepared for washing their face and rinsing their mouth.

“Good morning,” she nodded, “You got up quite early.”

“I’m old,” Wendy smiled, “So the time I need to sleep has also become less and less.”

“Oh, it is already dawn?” Nightingale said sleepily as she rubbed her eyes, “It seems I have to take a nap at noon.”

“Didn’t you sleep well last night?”

“Yes, I had many dreams.”

Sylvie curled her lips disapprovingly; she had clearly seen that the other side had stealthily went off to the third floor of the castle, moving back and forth in front of the Lord's door for a long time. However, because of Nightingale's unique ability, she couldn't see what Nightingale was doing. Anyway, it had already been late by the time she'd come back. "Last night, you didn't..."

The moment she began to speak, Nightingale suddenly turned around, staring straight at Sylvie. Her slightly narrowed eyes made her meaning self-evident – thus, the latter had immediately closed her mouth. Everyone with eyes had been able to see the strength of the number one combat witch in the Witch Alliance. The image of her swiftly moving through the sky and killing the Devils like a wraith was still vivid in her mind. If she ever came to Sleeping Island, Sylvie feared that even Lady Ash wouldn't be her opponent. So, when she received the silent warning, Sylvie felt that it would be better if she didn't act too curious.

"What happened last night?" Wendy asked in wonder.

"Keke," she said, "I heard her snore last night, it must be because of the large amount of energy she'd used up in the past few days."

"That must be it," Nightingale agreed while shrugging her shoulders. She took off her nightgown, revealing her well-proportioned and harmonious body, and began to put on the undergarment which had been gifted by His Highness.

That said, by now, even Wendy had fully accepted this clothing,

even going so far as recommending it to her.

Sylvie had no choice but to say, His Highness Roland was indeed a very fearful man.

But when she thought of him, Sylvie's heart was also filled with warmth.

There actually exists a noble who willingly sustain injuries for a witch.

When she had seen Roland bravely dashing forward, with no thought to his personal safety, and push Anna's body out of harm's way, at the bottom of her heart, she felt touched. All the witches of the Witch Alliance weren't some tools he intended to control. But they are important people to him, even... companions. His reaction at that moment couldn't have been a lie; he is indeed standing on the side of us witches, just like Tilly Wimbleton.

If Roland and Tilly can stand together hand in hand, and unite the strengths of both cities, they might truly be able to create a new country. A place where witches and ordinary people make no distinction between what's their's and what belongs to the other.

She decided to write a letter to Lady Tilly.

"Your older brother, His Highness Roland, is truly a good person."

Chapter 299 - Information And Messenger

Graycastle, within a garden of a mansion inside King's City's inner city.

Today was the scheduled day for the exchange of information. While sitting on a soft chair in the living room, Theo was waiting for the arrival of the members of the acrobatic group "Pigeons and Hat". Since the beginning of autumn, the closing of the inner gates had shifted to an earlier time in the evening, so the time for their secret meeting also needed to be changed to the afternoon.

Like always, the first to arrive at the mansion was Hill Fawkes.

On his upper body, he wore a blue collarless jacket made of velvet and around his neck he was wearing a white tie, while on his lower body he was also wearing shallow gray leggings and moccasins. He was dressed remarkably similar to an aristocrat. After giving his salute, he took the book "The Kingdom's History of social custom" which was clipped between his armpit and returned it to Theo. The latter took the book, glanced at Hill and asked with interest, "Done with reading?"

"Yes," Hill nodded, then hesitated a moment before asking, "Won't you teach me some wrestling; fencing... or maybe, assassination techniques?"

"Why?"

"At the time of the demonic disease's outbreak, you said you were

going to train me to be a qualified spy,” he scratched his head, “But so far, you’ve only been giving me these strange books to read.”

“Are you speaking about the ‘Kingdom’s History of social customs’?” Theo asked as he took a cup of wine, and threw two ice cubes into it, then went on to say, “This isn’t something you should call a strange book, within it is written the origin of the nobles, their traditions and heraldry, as well as the specialties of all the regions within the kingdom. As a spy, you must first be experienced and knowledgeable, to roughly be able to distinguish between the information with value and those without. As for fencing and assassination?” He smiled, “I never intended to let you infiltrate into some organization or penetrate deeply into the enemy territory to scout for information. That kind of task is dangerous yet requires a lot of time and effort. Before we put in so much effort, it might be better if we directly step forward and bribe the informed people with gold royals.”

“But you cannot buy everyone,” Fawkes insisted.

“And those organizations from which not even a drop of water can leak out, are equally awful targets to try and insert an eye in. Without putting in ten to twenty years of effort into it, it is unlikely that one can submerge into them.” Theo shook his cup, and drank a mouthful of ice wine before he further said, “There are only two things required from a qualified spy: distinguish between information and keep yourself hidden. The reason I gave you these books was to lay the foundation for you to be able to identify information, as for the second point... as a former member of the acrobatic troupe, you should already be more experienced with it than I. For instance, the clothes you are wearing today, are excellent.”

“...” Just as Hill Fawkes was lowering his head to think about the meaning of these words, Clown and the others finally arrived at this remotely placed residence.

“Sir, everyone is present.”

“This being the case, we’ll start at once,” Theo said, put his cup down and opened a notebook, “Who will be the first?”

“I’ll go first, Sir,” Rocky Mountain, the tallest and strongest person among them said, “There’s a new batch of people who’ve moved into the camp East of King’s City.”

This unexpected message made the personal guard’s brow jump slightly, he hadn’t expected that the first news he received would already be something bad. Since Timothy had lost more than half of his Royal Knights, the garrison built on the outskirts of King’s City had now become the base for the militia. All the rats, refugees, and criminal Timothy had drafted were placed in the strategically placed camp east of King’s City before they would head into battle. It’s just a bit longer than a month that a team of more than a thousand militia had last left for the Western Territory, but they already found new people to replenish?

“How many have come?”

“There are only two or three hundred people at the moment, and it seems that most of them came from the Northern Territory... apart from them, there are also some Blood Sail rats, but the ratio

of those are one to two. There aren't many rats left who are willing to leave."

"Keep a close watch on their movements, and whenever more than two hundred new people come to the camp, you have to report to me at once," Theo ordered.

"Yes, Sir."

These people only have one use, which is, to be used as a consumable after being fed those pills. Now after the Queen of Clearwater has gone northward, there is no longer any opposition at the Southern Border. Thus, Timothy will undoubtedly continue his attack on His Royal Highness's territories. I have to send this information back to Border Town as soon as possible.

"The next one to go is this humble Clown, this one bares some confidential information, or to be more precise, information shared due to the wondrous influence of alcohol," Clown said in an exaggerated manner. "I'm unable to verify whether it is genuine or false, but according to a group of merchants, with a lot of face and a nose for money, this story can be regarded as the truth. They've said that Garcia Wimbledon's Black Sail Fleet has appeared in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter, where they launched an attack against the Church, and with this also bringing the siege on the Wolfsheart Kingdom's city walls to a stop. The merchants were all preparing to take advantage of the time before the beginning of winter, and wanted to try and sell some needed goods."

The Queen of Clearwater actually went to the Kingdom of Eternal Winter? This information came somewhat unexpected for Theo.

However, it wasn't important whether this information was true or false, since she has chosen to leave Graycastle and sail northward, it was equivalent to having given up her right to fight for the throne, "That's it?"

"Alright, I know that the source of the matter is a bit far from Graycastle," he stuck out his tongue. "Next time I will make some inquiries about more immediately useful information."

"Keke," Hill coughed twice, "Sir, I found some new clues regarding the task you have entrusted with. Timothy has opened a new workshop in the inner city, recruited a lot of clay artisans, and is also shipping the recently acquired large amount of saltpeter to that place. However, the workshop is heavily guarded, which made it impossible for my people to learn anything more about what the saltpeter is being used for."

"Oh?" Theo's spirit was lifted, "They brought the saltpeter towards the workshop?"

"That's right," Hill confirmed, "I have personally tracked one of those carts to the workshop."

This was a very valuable information. Since Theo had been at His Highness Roland's side for such a long time, he naturally knew that the all-conquering gunpowder was a type of alchemic good, the main ingredient of which was saltpeter. Thus, when he noticed that the King began to acquire the saltpeter from the surrounding tanning fields in large amounts, he'd arranged Hill Fawkes to go and inquire about its whereabouts and use.

Now, after the other side had transferred it to a workshop of the Alchemy Association, their intentions have become very apparent – taking the next step from alchemic experiments to workshop manufacturing, indicated that they have now grasped the prescription of gunpowder. The priority of this intelligence was even higher than the need to gather new people in the Eastern camp.

“Well done.” Theo praised.

After the end of the secret meeting, everyone left the mansion in batches.

The moment before Hill left, he suddenly turned around and asked, “Sir, by doing all of this, will we really be able to topple Timothy from his throne?”

“Of course,” the personal guard answered, “Haven’t you seen the letter sent by His Highness? Timothy’s throne is already shaking.”

Later in the evening, when he returned to the tavern “Covert Trumpeter”, Theo was greeted by an unexpected acquaintance: Sean.

Just like himself, he was also one of the 4th Prince’s personal guards.

After arriving at his room on the second floor, they exchanged some greeting for a moment, before Theo closed the curtains and whispered, “How did you know where I was staying?”

“His Highness gave me a letter, and told me to look for Miss Margaret, who already knows about your whereabouts.” Sean took out a sparkling, pure red gem and waved it around.

“Does he have a new task?”

“It’s not a task, it’s a gift,” Sean said, and smiled as he walked to the window. He opened it to a slit and blew a whistle. Soon Theo saw three beige colored birds come flying into the room and drop on the table then immediately call out, “Googoo”. After feeding each of the birds with some wheat, they finally settled down.

It was Theo’s first time to see such intelligent birds, “This is...”

“These are a witch’s trained messengers.” Sean explained, while he stroked one of those beige colored bird’s neck, “The difference between them and a carrier pigeon is, that they can independently travel back and forth between two places, without needing a person to take them away. So, they can fly home on their own afterward. You only have to say a specific keyword to the birds; and they will deliver the message right into His Royal Highness’ hands. If everything goes well, you’d only have to wait a day before you’d receive a reply.”

Chapter 300 - Witch House

“Ahoool, Ahoool!”

At the newly rebuilt castle backyard, Maggie, fiddling with her wings and tail, was moving around under everyone’s appreciative gaze.

Although Roland had already heard about it from the witches’ own mouths, when seeing Maggie’s “demonic beast form” for the first time, he still felt genuinely shocked.

This enormous brown-skinned bird was ten meters long from the top of its head to the tip of its tail, it had a wingspan of around fifteen meters. Its wings were similar to the fleshy wings of a bat, and when facing the sun, he could clearly see its thin blood vessels and its skeleton. Likely because its body was too long, the bird had four limbs altogether, which was as thick as an adult arm with claws at their end, which it used to support its body.

However, the most eye-catching thing was the head – it had three eyes, forming a triangular shape. Furthermore, the rest of the head was an entirely bloody mouth which was able to open itself as wide as a sacrificial bowl, very unlike a normal bird’s beak. Whenever Maggie opened her mouth to speak, she’d expose a row of sharp teeth and a long tongue, a sight which cause the other witches to shout out in fear.

“Is this the Devil’s flying mount?” Leaves exclaimed. “Fortunately, we didn’t run into such a monster during our time in

the wilderness, or we would have never been able to run away.”

“If not for her evolving and getting this new ability, I’m afraid I wouldn’t have been able to come back,” Nightingale said while petting Maggie’s smooth neck. “I will prepare a pocketful of small pieces of grilled fish for you every day.”

“Ahool-!”

“I know, I’ll pour some honey over them.”

Hearing this promise, the bird’s tail began swinging more cheerfully.

Those fish are obviously all mine, Roland secretly sighed, without permission, she just takes the kitchen food to reward others, don’t make it sound as if you are doing something great ah!

“Alright, then let us check your new skill according to the old rules.”

“Ahool!”

After a morning of endless repeating, Roland obtained all the details about Maggie’s new beast form.

Following the previous convention of magnification, her brown skinned giant bird form was larger than the original Devil's mounts, in addition, her lifting capability was also increased, allowing her to carry two witches. However, the flight speed she could maintain when fully loaded was only about eighty kilometers per hour, which compared with Lightning was much slower.

Anyway, Maggie's strong point was that she had sufficient enough persistence to carry heavy weights without having to reduce the height she was flying at, unlike Lightning. At the same time, this new transformation also consumed more magic, but after completely changing into a giant bird, no matter if she was flying at a high or a low altitude, or carrying one or two people, her magic consumption remained extremely little. The only issue to consider was her own physical power.

Nowadays, the amount of magic power Maggie could contain within her body had also increased by a significant margin, allowing her to jump from a place at the bottom of the Witch Alliance to among the middle level. Meaning that she could now change her form seven to eight times a day.

Apart from this, through Maggie, Roland could confirm one of his previous speculations.

The witches' chance to evolve was due to their understanding of their own ability, regardless of whether they grasped this kind of knowledge through learning or in a sudden flash of realization, it could always provoke a change of their ability.

This also implied, that there existed a possibility for natural

evolution – as long as they lived long enough, there would always be one or two lucky ones who could rise above others. When one compared their first ability with their ability after their evolution, it was like comparing heaven and earth, so much that even something rotten could become something mystical. Was that the reason why the Church was trying to suppress the wild witches?

After consuming lunch, the Lord's castle area welcomed a major event.

After nearly four months of construction and decoration, it was finally the day that they would put the witch house to use.

Looking at the merely three-layer building, with less than fifty suites, Roland sighed endlessly. When placed into the future, this kind of house could only be regarded as being at the level of a self-constructed countryside home; but here, it represented the highest degree of architecture in the mainland – not because of its scale, but rather the technology behind it.

It was the first house made out of a mix of bamboo reinforced concrete, and bricks.

Roland could still remember how Karl, pouring the first column of reinforced concrete, had said to him with all sorts of feeling welled up in his heart, “That cement could originally also be used like this, that it can be shaped into any desired form when mixed with cobble, and also be used anywhere in the house... Your Royal Highness, I think it won't be long until the stonemason occupation disappears from the masonry work.

Apart from the beams of the roof, all the other floors of the witch house were made out of precast concrete slabs. When he looked at those pieces of concrete slabs with holes in the middle, Roland felt like he'd returned to the time of his childhood – only back in the eighties could this kind of ancient building material still be seen. However, by the time he was ten, cast-in-place concrete floors had already replaced it, and in time the technique had been completely abandoned.

And now in Border Town, the “backward” technique of precast concrete slabs was once again reborn.

The Witch House was located on the left side of the castle, forming together the letter “L”. After the expansion of the garden, its area was three to four times larger than before, so even with those two buildings there was still enough open space left for Leaves to improve her various kinds of fruits and crops.

Evelyn, with a somewhat anxious and frightened feeling, checked into the brand-new house.

It was already more than one month since she'd came to Border Town, but until now it seems that besides serving His Highness wine she had done nothing else. Furthermore, with merely five points in the last exam, she was also at the bottom of all of the witches... Although Scroll had never announced the results to the public, this kind of thing was easy enough to guess as long as she did some private inquiry.

Even Honey, who only spoke to birds the whole day long had gotten seven points!

She suddenly felt that there was no difference between herself and an idiot.

Even so, she couldn't detect any difference in the way His Highness treated her and the others. He would still find her to talk about the characteristics of the wine from time to time, often under the pretense of bringing a newly-made painfully burning white spirit. Furthermore, she had also got one gold royal as last month's salary, something which aggravated her feeling of insecurity even more – compared to the other four, she felt like nothing more than a freeloader.

“There is actually a kitchen dedicated to cooking next to the living room, in addition, there is a strange little room which they'd painted white. Quickly come and look,” Candle, opened the bedroom door and started talking excitedly.

“Hmm...” Evelyn responded weakly without strength.

“What happened? Are you feeling unwell?” Candle asked in concern, while squatting down in front of her and feeling her forehead, “You're not too hot.” Then she suddenly laughed and said, “Don't tell me, are you missing sleeping in one bed together with our sisters from the Witch Alliance?”

For a moment Evelyn was silent, then whispered, “We have been

here for over a month, right?”

“More or less.”

“Lotus is responsible for the construction of the new wall, which she will soon be finishing. Honey is in charge of training new messengers, and Sylvie, even accompanied His Highness to investigate those terrible monsters,” She said frustrated. “Only I still have nothing to do. I didn’t even get an arranged training plan, my exam’s results were also the worst... I really do not know why His Highness wanted me to come.”

“Oh.” After pondering about it a bit, Candle answered, “Why don’t you go and ask him in person?”

“Huh?”

“His Highness, Roland is Lady Tilly’s brother, you have seen how he treats us witches with sincerity. Even Sylvie, who always kept saying, ‘Keep away from Roland, be vigilant of the Prince,’ has changed her words, and even went as far as saying some words of praise yesterday.” Candle shrugged, “As long as you asked him with someone else present, it is impossible that he will chew you out, isn’t that right?”

It seems her words contain some truth. Evelyn thought, in order to no longer torture herself, she decided to act in accordance with Candle’s suggestion.